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RELIGION AND THE STUDY
OF LITERATURE

BROTHER LEO

BOOKS BY BROTHER LEO

Teaching the Drama and the Essay.

Religion and the Study of Literature.

The Story of St. John Baptist de la Salle.

**A' Kempis's Imitation of Christ, Edited
with introduction and notes.**

RELIGION AND THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

BY
BROTHER LEO

OF THE BROTHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

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NOTE

THIS is not a book of methods; it is a book of principles and illustrations designed to aid teachers and students who may stand in need of such aid to fashion or to modify methods of their own. More, perhaps, than is the case in the teaching of any other subject, the approach to literature is impeded rather than assisted by hard and fast rules, machine-made standards and galling provisos. All real teachers of literature agree on certain objectives, but each teacher feels, or should feel, free to adopt—and adapt—the methods he finds most fruitful and congenial in reaching his ends. Yet, if he be wise, he will take account of the methods other teachers have employed; hence our illustrations. And if he be thoughtful, he will shape his work in consonance with generally accepted foundation stones of thought; hence our principles.

Specifically, this book is aimed at Catholic teachers and Catholic students in Catholic schools. The Catholic conception of education welcomes and even stresses the possibilities of correlation between the subjects of the curriculum and the Catholic faith. The Catholic school teaches religion as a formal and distinct branch; but it also teaches—or should teach—every other branch in the light of the Catholic

philosophy of life. This book tries to outline and suggest some of the possibilities of correlation between religion and literature.

The chapters on Dryden and "The Little Flower" have appeared in *The Catholic World*, and the chapter on "The Imitation" in *The Catholic Educational Review*. The remainder of the book is based on a series of articles published originally in *The Catholic School Journal*.

L.

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE,
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RELIGION AND THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE MEANING OF RELIGION

As a primary and all-inclusive definition — one springing both from the nature of the idea and the denotation of the word — we may say that religion means a union of God and man, of the Creator and the creature, of the Saviour and the soul, of divinity and humanity. This notion of union underlies all conceptions of religion, even those which in some of their principles are fallacious and in some of their practices are unholy. The oriental devotee, in aiming at the complete annihilation of his bodily appetites, his intellect, his emotional nature and even his will, is bringing into practice one concept of this union; and, to take a rather extreme modern instance, the Holy Roller seeks the same ideal of union in the diametrically opposite expedient of violent physical activity. The Sacraments of the Catholic Church find psychological justification inasmuch as they are all means of uniting the individual soul with God, and the men and women who adopt what we call the religious life are most accurately designated *religious* because they avail themselves of certain definite

means of securing and maintaining the union of their individual lives and efforts with the Divine Life and the Divine Plan.

When we analyze the concept of union, with or without its religious connotations, we find that it implies three essential elements: 1 and 2, the capacity or capability for union on the part of each of the uniting entities; and, 3, the means by which the union is effected. Thus, the act of mingling water and wine presupposes a capacity for mixture in each of the liquids, and, further, a definite physical act by which the mingling is consummated. Thus, when a worker affiliates himself with a labor union, there is, first, the fact that the union is open to new members; secondly, the fact that the worker is willing and able to join the union; and, finally, the fact that the affiliation is accomplished by such definite means as the acceptance by the union of the worker's application for membership and the acceptance by the worker of certain obligations imposed by the union.

And so, inherent in even the most generic conception of religion, or union of the soul with God, are three distinct elements: 1, the Divine inclination for union with the soul; 2, the aspiring desire of the soul for union with God; 3, the agencies or means by which the union of the soul with God is brought about. The Catholic conception of religion is beautifully set forth in the discourse of Our Lord to His disciples after the Last Supper, where the three elements underlying the union of the soul with the

Father are luminously explained. And countless passages of Holy Writ promulgate the same principle. "I have loved you with an everlasting love," is an expression of the Divine inclination for union with the soul; "I will arise and will go to my Father," voices the human aspiration after union with God; and the existence of means of accomplishing and maintaining the union of the Divine and the human is indicated in the admonition: "If he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican."

It is not necessary for our present purpose to ask whether or not the human aspiration after union with God has its inception in the Divine inclination for union with the soul. That is a theological rather than a literary aspect of the matter and involves a consideration of the doctrines of grace and predestination, of the true teachings of St. Augustine and St. Thomas and the Council of Trent, of the false teachings of Pelagius and Luther and Calvin. It suffices, for the purpose of this study, to recognize the three elements involved in that form of union which is called religion, and to ask ourselves with which of the three elements is literature essentially concerned.

Obviously, not with the first or the third. God speaks to the soul through the movements of inspiration and of grace, through the Sacred Writings and through the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Now, while the Bible is truly literature, while, indeed, it

is the finest collection of books, regarded from the literary point of view, within reach of humanity, it is neither literature *because* it is inspired nor inspired *because* it is literature. Holy Mother Church, wisest of psychologists, has consistently sought to preserve her children from either error, and has insisted upon regarding the Bible mainly and essentially as the Written Word of God, not as — and this is a not inadequate definition of literature — the written word of man. It was a failure to recognize this important distinction that caused St. Augustine, early in his career, to turn away from the Sacred Writings because he was chilled by the simplicity of their literary style. There is, of course, a human element in the Bible even as there is a human element in the Church, but it is not the human element that gives the Bible its sacred character or the Church her infallible authority.

Nor is literature essentially concerned with the third element in religious union, the means by which the soul is brought into communion with God. Those means, we Catholics hold, are contained in the Sacraments instituted by Christ and in the moral practices and the official acts of worship authorized by His Teaching Church. Those are the ordinary and official means of union of the soul with God, though, for certain persons who in good faith live outside the Catholic communion, there exist what the late Monsignor d'Hulst¹ calls the unofficial means of

¹ In his letters to a penitent, posthumously published under the title, "The Way of the Heart."

union, enjoyed by those non-Catholics who, in the terminology of Catholic theology, belong to the soul of the Church. But those means of religious union, official or unofficial, ordinary or extraordinary, pertaining either to the body and the soul of the Church or to the soul alone, have no necessary literary relations or implications. This is but to say in other words that poetry is not necessary unto salvation, that the highest form of union, the eternal enjoyment of the Beatific Vision in Heaven, may be secured without the ministrations of art.

But with the second element of religious union, the aspiration of the soul toward God, literature is most intimately and vitally and necessarily concerned. For literature is a record and expression of human experience, of human emotion, and this upward striving of the soul of man, this seeking of the human for union with the Divine, is of all human experience the most searching and universal, of all human emotion the most fertile and sublime. The recognition and embodiment of man's aspiration after God is not the only element of literature, but it is an element pervasive and fundamental. Great literature, genuine literature, there cannot be without it. It was the artist as well as the saint in Augustine that voiced a universal truth: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless ever till they rest in Thee."

So widely recognized is this truth, so repeatedly is it expressed in literature, that its acceptance has become

almost a commonplace of vital literary criticism. Thus, one of the most scholarly and capable American reviewers, Mr. Paul Elmer More, though not a Catholic, though not in any religiously accepted sense a Christian, has brought it potently to our attention in his essay on Pascal. He reminds us that, in commenting upon Pascal's graphic picture of the infirmity and misery of human nature, Voltaire had said: "I dare to take the part of humanity against this sublime misanthrope; I dare to assert that we are neither so evil nor so wretched as he says." Whereupon writes Mr. More:

"From the point of view of common sense, from the feelings of the man absorbed in the tumult of diversion and business, Voltaire is right, and Pascal himself admits as much. But there is another point of view, and when once the inner eye has been opened to this aspect of life, though it catch but a glimpse of that vision and close again to its own night, the words of Voltaire seem but the language of one born blind. When once the sting of eternity has entered the heart, and the desire to behold things *sub specie aeternitatis*, when once the thirst of stability and repose has been felt, for that soul there is no longer content in the diversions of life, and, try as he will to conceal to himself the truth, with every pleasure and amid every distraction he tastes the cloying drop of bitterness. Henceforth, in the midst of enjoyment, he knows, with Pascal, how 'horrible a thing it is to feel slip away all that one possesses'; and he cannot forget

that 'the last act is bloody, however fair all the rest of the comedy; in the end we throw a little earth on the head, and it is over for ever.' It is not exaggeration to say that the consciousness or unconsciousness of this dualism is the most fundamental mark of division among men. Herein lies the distinction between civilizations, between faith and reason, between religion and rationalism, between piety and morality, between genius and talent."¹

That "sting of eternity," that "desire to behold things *sub specie aeternitatis*," is the second element in religious union, the element that finds its place, and that a prominent place, in every poem, every novel, every essay and every play that can be approached in an earnest spirit, that possesses the quality of permanence, that in any serious sense can be regarded as literature at all. There have been and there are writers who regard it not, but they at best are but the idle singers of an empty day; however pleasing their artistry, however great their skill in the marshalling of words, however strong their efforts and however widespread their evanescent vogue, they are destined, by reason of the very nature of things, to vanish on the morrow like snow upon the desert's dusty face. Mr. More is profoundly right. A perception of the religious implications of literature is, in writers, in critics, in teachers, the distinction between genius and talent.

That perception is manifold, and therefore its expression in literature is a thing of infinite variety. It

¹ Shelburne Essays, sixth series.

is the white light that beats upon the sightless eyes of *Œdipus* and the fury-driven haste that flings *Orestes* upon the temple stairs. It dictates, as with angelic voice, the morning hymn in Milton's *Paradise*. The Knights of the Round Table and their golden-bearded king, whether they joust in the sombre pages of Malory or in the singing verses of Tennyson, find in it the explanation of both triumph and defeat. It is the heart of Hamlet's mystery and the burden of Mignon's song. It animates Plato's conception of friendship and of love, starts spears of sudden sunlight through the umbrageous growth of Spenser's prosody, makes human documents of the literary criticisms of Brunetière and the colorful travel tales of Louis Bertrand. It is the salt of literature, as religion itself is the salt of the earth.

The cry, bitter or joyous, of the human heart seeking after God is what gives rare literary quality to so many pages of the Holy Bible. For that book of books, though the inspired and authentic voice of Heaven, is likewise the appealing heart cry of the children of men. David, the prophet and the symbol of the predestined Messiah, records in his psalmody the message of the Creator seeking the creature's love; but David, the human being with the consciousness of sin, in those same sacred songs wafts to highest Heaven the secrets of a human heart that knows the mingled anguish and content of the creature in search of the love of the Creator: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so doth my soul pant after Thee, O God."

CHAPTER II

THE MEANING OF LITERATURE

PERHAPS we can get most readily to the heart of our subject if we assume as valid a definition of literature which, though conceivably lacking in logical precision, has worth by reason of its suggestiveness: *Literature is a verbal portrait of life.*

Of life. That Alexander Pope was a great poet is a debatable point, but there is no doubt whatever that he was wellnigh matchless as a coiner of epigrams and aphorisms envisaging essential truths. And one of the finest and most penetrating of his epigrams, one that has passed by reason of its appositeness into the proverbs of the English tongue, one that is recognized as a truism, even, so obvious and withal so significant is its kernel of sound sense, is this: "The proper study of mankind is man." That epigram is a foundation principle, a seed thought, a point of departure, for the musician, for the painter, for the sculptor, for the philosopher, for the historian; but especially does it shape the aims and control the methods of the litterateur. For, in the last analysis, human life is the stuff out of which great books are made. Every maker of literature and every student of literature might appropriately take as his

motto that distillation of Popean wisdom; that, or else that similarly searching utterance of the Latin dramatist, Terence: "I am a man; and nothing that is human can be foreign to me."

This *vital* element in literature — the essential truth of the great book to the life of man and of men — is an unfailing and indispensable characteristic of all literary masterpieces, no matter when or where or in what tongue produced, no matter what philosophy of life looms as their background or what ideal of life animates their inspiration. It is as true of the Homeric poems, which embody a naïve, a boyish, outlook on life, as it is true of the novels of George Meredith or of Mr. Joseph Conrad, which embody an outlook on life immeasurably more complicated and sophisticated; it holds good for the rude and vigorous religious plays which mark the beginnings of the English drama not less than for the highly technical and painfully polished dramatic contributions of a later day, such as Mr. Jerome K. Jerome's "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," and Mr. Charles Rann Kennedy's "The Servant in the House"; it is present in the Psalms as in Sappho, in Theocritus as in Mr. Alfred Noyes or in Mr. Walter de la Mare. Literature springs from the heart of a man who knows much about life and who sympathizes deeply with life; and its educational, its cultural value springs from the fact that the reading of literature produces a corresponding growth of human knowledge and human sympathy in the heart of the student.

A portrait. Yet, not every book that concerns itself with human life is literature, not every man who writes with a fullness of human knowledge and a store of human sympathy is a literary artist. A treatise on moral theology is undeniably a very human — conceivably, even a very humane — sort of book; yet it is not literature. This morning's newspaper veritably bristles with facts about men and women, about human conditions and human aspirations; yet it is not literature. The love letters exchanged between a rustic Darby and a suburban Joan are, to say the least, astonishingly sympathetic missives; yet they are not literature. How comes it that Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" is literature, and the treatise on moral theology — with which that novel has so much in common — is not? That Shakespeare's historical plays are literature, and the morning newspaper is not? That Mrs. Browning's love letters, the "Sonnets from the Portuguese," are literature, and Joan's love letters are not? What is the difference?

It is the difference between the snapshot and the portrait. We are all familiar with the devotee of the folding kodak who peremptorily stands us against a blank wall, admonishes us to look pleasant, and photographs us even while our mouths widen in unavailing protest. If we are of a philosophic turn of mind, the resulting picture ordinarily gives us abundant food for speculation. We can, on the one hand, establish by a strictly scientific line of reasoning that the print does really represent us and no other human

being; and yet, on the other hand, we are absolutely certain — and in this all of our friends, except the amateur photographer, will agree — that this counterfeit presentment is not our likeness at all. Our garments do not hang upon our frame in that unseemly fashion; our hands and our ears are manifestly not so large and prominent; we hold the mirror up to nature and assure ourselves that our poor faces are innocent of so many marring lines and shadows. And, like a good many philosophers, when confronted with all the evidence, we seek refuge in an eminently human form of dualism, and to the momentous query, "Is this your likeness?" we equivocally reply, "Extrinsically, yes; intrinsically, no!"

And now let us suppose that to salve our vanity and conserve our self-respect, we arrange for sittings with a celebrated portrait painter. We shall probably find the process lengthy, even to the point of fatigue. The artist makes us come to his studio day after day, and he paints very little and talks very much. He makes us talk, too. He probes our mind, he sounds our soul; he familiarizes himself with our likes and our dislikes, with our political and religious beliefs, with our theories of art and life, with our sorrows and our joys, our ideals and our ambitions. And, again if we are of a philosophical turn of mind, we presently say to ourselves, "This man is painting my likeness from the inside." Eventually, the portrait is completed and exhibited to the scrutiny of a few discreet friends and true. They look at the

painting, and then at us; and when we ask them, "Is this my likeness?" they, too, take refuge in the convenient dualistic formula and impressively reply: "Intrinsically, yes; extrinsically, no!"

What is the difference between the snapshot and the portrait? It is the difference between *fact* and *truth*. And that, bereft of accidental distinctions, is likewise the difference between "The Scarlet Letter" and the treatise on moral theology, between Shakespeare and the newspaper, between the love letters of Mrs. Browning and the love letters of suburban Joan. The portrait has an aesthetic appeal, as has Hawthorne and Shakespeare and the "Sonnets from the Portuguese"; and that *aesthetic* element in the real book is an unfailing characteristic of real literature.

Somebody has said that literature immortalizes the best moments of the best minds, and that view is felicitous; for while human life is truly the substance of literature, not everything in human life, or every moment or every manifestation of human life, is fit literary material. Art, after all, is largely selection, and selection of what is typical, significant. That is the essence of the art of portraiture; and it is the essence likewise of the art of writing. Art is not the mere presentation of human life in the raw, in the rough; rather is it, as Michelangelo said, the purgation of superfluities. Like the portrait painter, the literary artist depicts human life from the inside; and in so doing he concentrates on essential truth and makes his work a thing of beauty. Literature deals not

with facts, but with truth; that is why Shakespeare's plays constitute a work of art, and that is why the morning newspaper does not.

A verbal portrait. Portraiture of life is, so to say, the genus of literature; language is its specific difference. The painter, the musician, the poet, all three aim in general at interpreting and manifesting human life in terms of beauty; that is the general aim of all art. But each uses distinct materials. The painter sings in lines and colors; the musician paints in concourse of sweet sounds; but the poet's brush is human speech and his music a symphony of words. Literature, therefore, is a verbal portrait; and when we recognize that obvious fact we recognize the *formal* element in literature.

Since the literary artist records in words the breath and finer spirit of his knowledge of human life, the quintessence of his interpretation of life, since his masterpiece is a portrait of life produced by the pigments of human speech selected in accord with the flair of his mood and personality, it follows that literature is a human document at once general and particular. The great book is a world in little, for the life of all humanity throbs in its pages; and the great book is at the same time something specific and unique, for it enshrines likewise the reactions to human experience of an individual mind and heart unusually keen and responsive. The classical writer—that is, the writer whose work is recognized as a faithful portrait of human experience, as an object

of intrinsic and surpassing beauty and as an original contribution to the philosophy of living — is necessarily endowed in a high degree with the faculty of expression. He probably knows life better than we do and sympathizes with it more keenly; but his distinctive trait is that he is articulate, that he is able to tell what he knows and to record what he feels. He transmits a significant message "along the slender wires of speech." The ordinary man may know life profoundly and may feel keenly its tragedy, its comedy, its sublimity, its beauty; but he lacks the ability to express his intellectual and emotional reactions in words fraught with conviction and aesthetic appeal. To revert to our earlier illustration, the lovelorn Joan may experience a very deep and genuine affection for the Darby of her heart; but when she seeks to record her emotions she evolves a screed positively grotesque in its clumsiness and inadequacy; but Mrs. Browning, moved and stirred by a similarly profound and authentic passion, is able to make her mood manifest and contagious in the delicate and touching sonnets that throb from her pen. For Mrs. Browning not only has something important to say about a given aspect of life, but likewise knows how to say it in words that delight us by reason of their beauty and convince us by reason of their essential truth.

The rôle of literature in life and the procedure of the literary artist may be hinted at in allegory. Five men were present at the creation of the world:

The philosopher, the scientist, the business man, the saint and the poet. And when God said, "Let there be light," and all things were made, each of the five men thought within himself. And the philosopher said, "*Why* has this thing been done?" And the scientist said, "*How* has this thing been done?" And the business man said, "Let me have it." And the saint said, "Lo, I will strive to unite myself for ever and ever with Him Who has done these things, for He is the Infinite Goodness and the ultimate consolation of my heart." But the poet pondered deeply and said low to himself, "These things are exceedingly beautiful"; and then going forth he made worlds of his own. And he fashioned his creations in living words, and he ceased not to sing, for a mighty impulse urged him ever on. And after many years the poems of his making were scattered even to the four corners of the earth. And the philosopher found some of the poet's songs, and he said, "These songs help me to see why the world was made." And the scientist found some of the poet's songs, and he said, "These songs are of a truth most skilfully constructed." And the business man found some of the poet's songs, and he said, "These songs I can sell to my fellow men and thereby make much money." And the saint found some of the poet's songs, and he said, "These songs are truly beautiful things, for the soul of them is the Infinite Beauty after Whom my spirit yearns." And the poet's songs echoed in the ears of many men as the singer wandered down the

byways of the world. And lovers heard them, and they loved the more; and haters heard them, and they hated less; and falling upon the hearts of the joyous, those songs multiplied the joy; and upon the hearts of the sorrowing, and their sorrow was not without hope. And after many years the poet ceased to sing; but the children of men said unto themselves: "Verily, his songs shall endure forever, for they are true and beautiful, and they tell us that which we ourselves do know."

CHAPTER III

RELIGION AND THE ENDS OF ENGLISH TEACHING

WHY do we teach English? What are our specific purposes in discussing "The Ancient Mariner," in explaining the difference between the transitive and the intransitive verb, in urging our pupils to write on "Every Man a Hero" and to speak on "The Funniest Thing I Know"? What have we in view to accomplish when we teach literature, grammar and expression?

To some teachers as to some students answers might come with difficulty. Perhaps we teach English for the same reason that the Englishman wears his gloves, "because it's rather the proper thing to do, you know." Perhaps we teach it because it's all in the day's work. Perhaps—but why stretch things to the verge of infinity? If we are really worthwhile teachers, if we have a clear conception of our status as men and as instructors, if we have in imagination the visualization of our pupils as citizens of the state and children of the Church, if, in short, we know the aims of Christian education in general, then we shall be able to formulate the reasons why we teach English.

Substantially they are these: 1. The appreciation of the best in literature; 2. The efficient use of English in speaking and writing; 3. The development of the critical faculty.

1. The first end of English teaching practically explains itself. We seek to have our pupils become conversant with the best that has been written, to enjoy real literature, to choose to spend a holiday afternoon with Dickens or Shakespeare or Palgrave's "Golden Treasury" rather than with Burt Standish or Clyde Fitch or the alleged funny section of the Sunday newspaper. We want them to get a relish for the great things of the mind and heart and imagination which literature contains, and to make friends for themselves among the masterpieces of world literature.

2. English is our pupils' mother tongue, and we want them to learn to use it, both in spoken and in written speech, as an instrument of the spirit at once flexible and shapely, sharp and bright. Their use of the mother tongue will be efficient when it is clear, correct, graceful, vigorous and urbane. It needs *clearness*, for language defeats its own purpose when its significance is not grasped by the audience to whom it is addressed; *clearness* is the very first essential in order of importance. Then comes *correctness*, which means good form in discourse; it is a matter of true gentility to clothe our thoughts in the fashion adopted by the majority of men and women who know. Grammar, be it said in passing, is valu-

able just insofar as it serves to acquaint the children with the usage of educated speakers and writers; from that usage it derives its sanction and its prestige. We look next for *grace* in the use of the mother tongue, for grace is a thing of beauty; he who possesses it in speech and writing preserves poise and begets confidence and masters the style which, as Herbert Spencer puts it in his suggestive "Philosophy of Style," so presents "ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort." *Vigor*, or what the old time rhetoricians spoke of as the "nervous" quality of style, is necessary to arouse and maintain variety in the tone of discourse and interest in the audience, to indicate by more or less subtle nuances the several shades of meaning our words are intended to convey. Vigor is of further value because it helps to carry conviction. *Urbanity*—we use the word in the sense adopted by Matthew Arnold in his essay on "The Literary Influence of Academies"—is somewhat allied to grace; but it differs from it by reason of its more comprehensive outlook. Urbanity eschews the provincial, the suburban, in vocabulary, in accent, in structure and in intonation.

3. The development of the critical faculty means the formation of right habits of mental and emotional reactions in the presence of literary products. It means the cultivation of sound literary instincts and the formation of salutary literary tastes. The student must come little by little to realize, not only

that a given book is a great book, but *why* it is a great book; and even when he is not able to set down the reasons for his preference, he must be conscious of an authentic feeling of justification for making it. He must learn, not merely to take the word of other people on the value of books, but to pass judgment for himself. The process of judging implies the possession of literary principles, the acquisition of which depends on the vital absorption of the best that has been written. Rules, as rules, are little else than useless here, for no set of rules, however detailed, can cover every case.

Such being accepted as a statement of the specific aims of instruction in English, the teacher must now recognize that in the correlation of religion with English he possesses a fertile means of securing in a high degree the attainment of the ends of literary study.

1. First, as to the matter of literary appreciation. Religion serves to explain, and goes far toward interpreting, many of the world's literary masterpieces. Hamlet's immortal soliloquy, without a recognition of its moral musings, becomes a senseless jumble of wild and whirling words. Faust's eternal search for happiness loses its significance and its zest if we do not see in it a symbol of all human striving after God. Vainly do we follow Evangeline in her love-inspired quest if we catch not the effulgence of the star of glorious Catholic faith that shone upon her gentle face even in the hour of her darkest trial and

that hallowed with its heavenly gleam the lowly cot where Gabriel the beloved was gathered to her heart at last.

Literary appreciation means the development of the aesthetic sense, and that development has its actual and potential dangers. In literary history we observe that periods of literary decadence often evolve out of periods of literary grandeur in which the aesthetic sense suffered from misproportioned development. In nations as in individuals, there is danger of undue emphasis being placed upon the aesthetic element, and the fruitage is invariably a violent reaction. Ultra-refinement tends inevitably to crassness and bestiality; the children of the kingdom delight themselves with the husks of swine. But a right insistence on the religious aspects of literary study and the judicious correlation of religious truth with literary appreciation will serve as a guide and a safeguard and will preserve the purely aesthetic element in life and art from over-accentuation.

Among the first lessons to be mastered in literary appreciation is that literature is not a thing apart. It is, in deepest truth, something vital, something human; it is one form of expression which man has used from the beginning, and it is associated at every turn with other modes of human expression. That literary appreciation is unsound and that literary knowledge is superficial which are not intelligently related to painting, to music, to sculpture, to architecture, to philosophy, to history, even to theoretical

and practical science. As a powerful aid to the student in attaining to this stimulating and comprehensive ideal comes religion—a bond which unites the literature he knows with the art or the philosophy he needs to know. Thus, Ellen's evening hymn in Scott's "Lady of the Lake" relates itself to the pictorial Madonnas of the great masters, to the churches reared in honor of Our Blessed Lady all over the world, to the theological distinction between *dulia* and *hyperdulia*. And from it all comes a perception of that unity in multiplicity, that harmony in dissonance, that similarity in contrast, that simplicity in complexity, which underlies all art.

2. Religion further stimulates the efficient use of English in speaking and writing. The child learns to write well, not by rule, but by example; and Catholic literature furnishes some of the finest specimens of virile, concise and beautiful English. It is no difficult task to bring the student to perceive that the literary excellence of "The Hound of Heaven" springs from the depth of religious experience in the soul of the man who wrote it; and presently he acquires the conviction that, all else being equal, his own efforts at oral and written expression will be strengthened and vivified in proportion to the degree of religious force he puts into them.

One reason why pupils fail to make progress in writing and speaking the mother tongue is weakness of motivation. They do not try hard enough, because they lack a sufficiently strong inducement.

That needed motive religion supplies. "Whatsoever you do in word or in work do all for the honor and glory of God." Once a student learns to reflect upon the meaning of "J. M. J." or "A. M. D. G." inscribed at the top of his theme paper, his work in composition is bound to improve, his use of the spoken word to increase in clearness, correctness, vigor. "Language," says Bishop Spalding, "should be pure, noble and graceful, as the body should be so: for both are vestures of the Soul."¹

Nor does the ministration of religion stop there. It furnishes him with a Model Who did all things well. The Catholic pupil is, in a sense, another Christ. In Baptism he became a child of God, in Confirmation a Soldier of the Militant Church; in Holy Communion he comes into the most intimate union with the Body and Soul of his Redeemer. So he is sweetly urged to act in everything as Christ would act, to speak at all times as Christ would speak. Here is a key to the practical efficiency of the Catholic school.

3. Humanly speaking, as we shall see in a succeeding chapter, John Dryden became a Catholic because he was so excellent a literary critic, because his perception of the value of norms and standards in affairs literary led him to see an analogous need of norms and standards in affairs religious. Conversely, the Catholic student, whose religious training has taught him the importance of values and distinctions in such topics as perfect and imperfect contrition, presumption

¹ Aphorisms and Reflections, p. 127.

and despair, mortal and venial sin, will have little difficulty in grasping the meaning of such literary values and distinctions as purity, propriety and precision, verbs strong and weak, styles dry, neat, elegant and florid. He will realize, too, that most important of all literary distinctions — the difference between absolute and relative perfection, which involves literary discrimination; and hence he will be able to perceive that we may greatly admire a given writer for one quality of literary workmanship without accepting his philosophy of life, and that we may cherish the content of a given book while withholding approval of the style in which it is written.

The criteria inculcated by religious training are not arbitrary, superficial standards. They go quite to the heart of life, and in their bases and in their implications they extend to the knottiest problems of human existence. Those same criteria, but very slightly modified and sometimes changed in nothing but nomenclature, are ever in demand in the literary field. In the most searching study of literature and of life the distinction sometimes fatuously drawn between moral goodness and literary excellence proves to be a distinction without a difference; for if literary history teaches one thing more insistently than any other it is that in the judgment of the ages — which is the court of last appeal in literary matters — the book that is ignoble from the viewpoint of morals cannot be a masterpiece from the viewpoint of art. The student, it has been said, needs principles as his

equipment for judging books; those principles religion gives him.

And more than that. Religion so informs his mind and fashions his heart that through its kindly ministrations he is furnished with a most potent prophylactic against evil books and pernicious literary influences. Certain volumes he can evaluate without even reading them through; he need but detect their immoral odor to pass veracious literary judgment.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGION IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

WHERE is the great book, the bit of world literature, that does not possess religious implications, that does not rest on some sort of religious basis? The Vedas, the earliest pieces of literature we know, are sacred books; they describe and glorify Angi, god of fire, Indra, god of the air, Varuna, god of justice, Rudra, god of spleen. The Vedas are to the far east what the books of the Bible are to the west—at once a sacred library and a literary treasure. The great epics, be they as early and anonymous in origin as the “Mahabharata” or as recent and as individual in authorship as “Paradise Lost,” have, too, their deep and prevailing religious atmosphere and content. For the gods hover above the war-scarred field of Troy, the gods reveal their lively interest in Æneas; and when the epic came under Christian influence and sprang forth as the expression of Christian ideals, poets like Milton and Tasso were insistent on its identification with religious dogmas, mysteries and practices. The best fiction has been consistently noteworthy for the embodiment of religious concepts; this is as true of the Waverley Novels as it is true of “Mr. Britling Sees It Through.” As for the drama, it is no

mere figure of speech to say that it was twice — in pagan and in Christian times — born at the foot of the altar. The essay, too, in its manifold form and infinite variety, has paid due heed to things religious; witness in France Bossuet and Sainte-Beuve and even Voltaire; witness in England Bunyan and Ruskin and Cardinal Newman.

Hence is justified the generalization that, historically considered, religion and literature have been closely connected; religious ideals have inspired all great books; no great book exists that has not an appreciable religious content. "Faith," wrote Edouard Rod, an exponent of the French neo-Christian literary movement of the last century, "has an answer for every curious question; it explains all. It gives the reason for our existence, since it proves to us that we are the center of the world; it lends us the courage to support our sufferings, since it teaches us that they are the preparation for a better destiny; it imparts a relish for life, since it convinces us that life is eternity. By plunging into mystery it has caused all fear thereof to vanish; its affirmations have banished doubt, and in the triumph of its certitude it has established a marvelously constructed system."

Due recognition of the religious element in books serves to make and keep the study of literature *vital*. The literary study that ignores the spiritual life and its implications can be at best nothing more than the study of irrelevant external aspects — of names and dates and merely stylistic characteristics and com-

parisons. Every important literary product touches in some way on a religious problem, and that problem should be the chief concern of the student who investigates literature as a presentation and interpretation of life. For let it be once and for all clearly understood and frankly admitted that the literary study which ignores the book's relation to human life—the life of the individual and the life of the race—is not literary study at all. It may be philology or grammar or rhetoric or literary history; but it is not the study of literature. Our Catholic schools and Catholic teachers have here a tremendous advantage inasmuch as they can present literary masterpieces in the light of religious ideals and associate the significance of great books with the religious concepts already existing in the minds of the students.

One of the great needs of literary study today is to keep it from becoming or remaining partial and provincial. The truly great book is not of an age or of a nation; it is a universal possession for all peoples and all times. No one national literature has a monopoly of the great books, and the student, even while very young, must come to realize that literature is as widespread and as common to the entire race as the sunset glow or the music of the sweeping wind or the perfume of the flowers or the phosphorescent sheen of the starlit sea. This ideal of literary study is largely achieved by stressing the religious element. For the religious note is one of the things that make all great books as one. In the light of his religious knowledge

the student can pass, without undue abruptness in the transition, from Longfellow's beautiful tale of the love that endures and is patient, to Shakespeare's portrait of the woman who loved not wisely but too well, to Goethe's record of the man who sought for happiness over all the ways of earth and found it only in forgetfulness of self, to the ascetical musings of Thomas a'Kempis, to the struggles of Ædipus in the grip of an implacable destiny, to the torments of the fire-bringing Prometheus chained to the vulture-beaten rock. The religious conception of existence is the open sesame to the spacious treasure house of the written word, to the imperishable record of what through all the ages man has thought and felt in terms of beauty and of truth.

Literature, as the record of human emotion, does not stand apart. Its meaning cannot be adequately garnered unless the student seeks to read it in connection with other fields of human endeavor and human accomplishment. No man may really know literature who does not likewise know something of painting and sculpture and music, something of philosophy, and history and science. Now the key to this necessary correlation is found in religion. It establishes an unsuspected bond of intimacy between Wordsworth's sonnet to the Most Blessed Virgin and the Sistine Madonna; between the cathedral of Rheims and Vondel's "Lucifer"; between Gregorian Chant and Browning's "The Ring and the Book." From such study will grow the realization that truth and

beauty possess an essential unity underlying their superficial complexity, because they are both reflections of the Eternal Truth and the Eternal Beauty of the Eternal God.

In following such a line of study the reader sometimes encounters a fancied difficulty. He discovers that some great books have been written by men who in their private life were far from exemplifying moral goodness, that books embodying religious ideals and even religious convictions have come from the pens of men who personally flouted those ideals and repudiated those convictions. The seeming difficulty arises solely from the failure to draw an important and vital distinction, — important because it concerns itself with every department of human thought and activity; vital because it is an illustration of one of the fundamental paradoxes of human nature. The tailor who makes me a faultless suit of clothes may be an ill-dressed sloven; the gardener who coaxes my roses into beauteous growth may be so ugly and misshapen a creature that the very dogs bark at him as he limps down the lane; the actor who delights me with the fine fury of a simulated nobility of character may be a wife-beater, a drunkard and a thief. It is no uncommon thing in literary annals to find a man who writes his best nature and lives his worst nature. It is the part of wisdom to accept truth and beauty wherever we find them, intent only on their nature and irrespective of their intermediate source. "The Genius of Christianity" is a noble piece of literature

and a potent apologia of the Catholic faith even though Chateaubriand was a conspicuous victim of human frailties and passions; "De Profundis" is a bit of glowing, soul-stirring, matchless prose even though the man who fashioned it in the furnace of a grief-scorched heart was a sinner of nameless sins. "By whomsoever truth is spoken," declares St. Augustine, "it is spoken by the aid of Him who is Truth itself."

A perception of the religious element in literature makes fresh and significant the literary values of many distinctively Catholic writings. This the secular world has already understood in reference to Dante, Thomas a'Kempis and St. Teresa; some day it may carry the understanding far enough to appreciate St. John of the Cross and the hymns and collects of the Roman Missal. At all events, it is most seemly that we Catholics learn, through the correlation of our literary study with our religious experience and convictions, to appreciate our own. The official prayers of the Church, as set forth in the collects, secrets and post communions of the liturgical year, constitute a rare thesaurus of literary gems, possessing the beauty and dignity of form, the sublimity and simplicity of conception, the rich human quality and the assured permanence which characterize all true literature. It is to be hoped that our Catholic schools and colleges will devote more attention to this vast and varied literary field which represents centuries of Catholic thought and Catholic life and which forms a goodly

portion of our distinctively Catholic heritage. The official prayers of the Church should be to the Catholic student what the moonlight and the dew were to the old woman in "Fiona Macleod's" "Man on the Moor":

"It's a blessing they are, a healing and a blessing: ay, so they are, the moonlight an' the dew. When we're young, summer's sweet wi'them: when we're old, they're in the heart still. It's the song left, the memory o' the song, a sweet air, when the bird's flown for aye. Ay, my dear, an' there's more than that to be said. God made the sun an' the day: the Holy Spirit, the night an' the stars; but Christ made the moonlight an' the dew."

To attempt the study of a literary masterpiece without a proper insistence on and an ample recognition of its religious significance and implications is to embark on a fruitless and a misleading undertaking. That path does not lead to light, to power, to peace; it but ensnares in the hopeless quagmire of a dryasdust scholarship infinitely removed from the pleasant and fruitful fields of sane and normal human life. The great book is of vital value to us only insofar as it truly becomes a part of ourselves, only insofar as the aspect of human life it depicts becomes in some way a part of the life we live day by day. The supreme duty of man, as recognized in the light of religious ideals, is to tend to union with God — through goodness, but likewise through beauty, through knowledge and through power.

Literature is beauty. At its best it is the reflection of the Infinite Beauty of God Himself caught up from the light that falls on nature and shines forth from the heart of man; and at the touch of that surpassing loveliness the great book grows of a sudden fragrant and gleams with heavenly tints, even as the flowers in Eden wafted their incense and flashed their colors when God walked in the garden of delights.

Literature is knowledge. The great book purges life of its non-essentials, of its dross and its slime, of its meannesses and indecencies and deceits. It presents life as it is in its fundamental, omnipresent manifestations. It conduces to that self-knowledge which is the basis of all true wisdom and to that sympathy with our fellow man which is the basis of social service and true Christian charity. Some potential saints remain potential because they lack that sympathy with others which only literature may impart. It makes for honesty; for in the great book we see ourselves and each other as in a glass wherein naught is extenuated, nor aught set down in malice.

Literature is power. The man who writes a great book comes as near as any mortal may to the supreme act of God Himself, *creation*. And the man who rightly and understandingly reads a great book exercises what is, after creation, the closest approximation to the Omnipotence of God, *appreciation*. The right reading, the true appreciation of a great book is indeed a form of creation, for, between them the writer and the reader beget something that had no previous exist-

ence. And this power which comes to us from our contact with the great book tends to *self-mastery*; and with self-mastery comes another form of power, *prestige*. Prestige in turn widens our influence over others and multiplies our possibilities of doing good.

CHAPTER V

RELIGION AND FORMAL APPRECIATION

By formal English we mean the theory of English — the definitions, devices, generalizations, rules and explanations generally grouped under the heads of grammar and rhetoric. Whatever name we may please to give to formal English, we must agree that, though its importance is often overestimated, its scope in the scheme of English teaching frequently widened beyond reasonable limits, and its potentialities as a linguistic therapeutic and prophylactic believed in beyond measure, formal English has its place in English teaching. Grammar and rhetoric are admittedly not practical subjects; they do not teach the pupil to speak and write as he should speak and write. Furthermore, the pupil may — and sometimes does — learn to speak and write with correctness and distinction without consciously securing so much as a bowing acquaintance with grammar and rhetoric, while his companion, who has been taught to commune with the sheeted shades of Murray and Gould Brown, may — and sometimes does — manifest but slender skill in the use of English in speaking and writing. But, when English is taught practically through exercises in reading, writing and speaking, a little grammar and

a little rhetoric will help both teacher and pupil. After all, why should we be such rigid utilitarians? Even if formal English does not produce a directly practical result, is it needful, nay, is it wise, to cast it forthwith into exterior darkness? Formal English aids the student to acquire the art of thinking; the framing of a definition in grammar and the formulation of a rule in rhetoric necessitate some degree of cerebral action and some exercise of judgment and discrimination. Formal English may do little more than teach the pupil the names of his tools; but it is sometimes convenient to name the tools as well as to use them.

Grammar is the specific theory of *correctness* in language; rhetoric, the generic theory of *efficiency*. Since correctness and efficiency are eminently religious ideals, and since the child in the Catholic school has been brought up in the light of religious ideals, it may be assumed that long before he is introduced to either grammar or rhetoric he has acquired some notion of both correctness and efficiency. The teacher can start him aright in the study of formal English by bringing him to recognize that some of the principles the child has learned in his little catechism and has striven to reduce to practice in his daily life are, at bottom, the same principles that he must now learn to apply in his use of the mother tongue.

Thus the child already knows that the fundamental reason why he should avoid sin and practise virtue is the Adorable Will of God. He knows that he should

always tell the truth, not merely because he may be involved in difficulties if he tells lies, but because God has expressed His Divine Will in the commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness." The basis of morality is the Will of God. Similarly he may be led to perceive that a given form of speech is correct, not because the textbook in grammar says so, but because that form of speech is invariably employed by the majority of educated men and women. The basis of correctness in English is the usage of the best writers and speakers.

The correlation of religion and formal English may be achieved by the study of divergences as well as by the study of similarities. Thus the pupil can be led to recognize that while the moral law is something fixed, stable, permanent, the rules of grammar are, in different ages and places, variable, inconstant, changeable. The double negative, for example, is grammatically wrong, not because "two negatives make an affirmative," for they make nothing of the kind, but because at the present time careful and competent speakers and writers of English no longer use the double negative. He can be led to see that while the command, "Thou shalt not steal," applies with equal force in America, in Spain, and in France, the double negative, though incorrect in English (*I cannot find no pencil*), is thoroughly good form in Spanish (*no tengo nada*) and in French (*je ne parle pas*).

The mutability of the rules of grammar and rhetoric

offers an interesting opportunity to associate its history with religious practices and institutions. This especially applies to that part of formal English which might be called amateur philology. Let us take the word *gossip*. If it were not for the Sacrament of Baptism we might indeed have had the idea, but not the word itself. The sponsor, because of the spiritual relationship he contracts with the baptized person, was called in early English *a relative in God* or *Goddessib*. Sponsors, then as now, found the family celebration incidental to the ceremony of baptism an admirable opportunity for unfolding the family history and for discussing the latest morsel of news. Some of them possibly contracted the habit of acting as sponsors and consequently of standing about in the vestibule of the church and discussing the crops, the weather, and even more intimate matters. It was inevitable that the title of *Goddessib* should be popularly conferred on any man or woman who habitually chatted at the entrance of the church, that frequent pronunciation of the name should knock the d's out of it and change the b to p, and lo, we have the word *gossip*, first as a noun meaning chum or pal or crony, now practically obsolete, and then as the verb with which modern society is not wholly unfamiliar.

It is a precept of formal English that the speaker, when mentioning several names, including his own, should place himself last save when indicating objects of shame or blame. So we say, "George, Henry, Alice

and I visited Germantown last month"; but "I and Walter didn't have our beads." This procedure, it can be readily surmised, is the outcome of politeness; but politeness is founded on Christian charity, a principle of which is to prefer others to ourselves, to do unto others as we would have others do unto us. Indeed, we have here a suggestion bearing upon the entire theory of formal English, a theory which is the foundation stone of Herbert Spencer's philosophy of style: That style is the best which yields its contained idea with the least expenditure of mental effort on the part of the reader.

Formal English includes a study of English idioms. Very many of our familiar turns of speech which in themselves mean nothing, but by reason of common consent and long association possess a definite signification, are the outgrowth of Catholic sentiments. A gentleman is calling on me this evening; and when he takes his departure he says to me, and I say to him, "Good night." At first glance this perfunctory greeting — possibly exchanged with genuine relief on both sides — has nothing in common with the practice of Christian prayer; but in form, if not in fact, we are really praying for each other. "Good night" is a condensed version of a beautiful and appropriate leave-taking prayer, "May God give you a good night." If my students have read the first scene of "Hamlet" they will recall the prayer in its transition form, "Give you good night." Thus may religious practices and religious backgrounds be utilized to

give the children a reason for the speech that is in them.

Formal English has its destructive as well as its constructive content. Among other things, rhetoric condemns certain forms of speech, which it brands *vulgarisms*, because educated and refined persons do not employ them. But why, a pupil may ask, are such forms of speech banned? In very many cases it will be found that vulgarisms have, or had, an immoral, an irreligious, an un-Christian significance; and that the forms of speech are not in good repute because the sentiments or ideas which they connote are unworthy and debasing on the lips of a man who loves God and respects His holy law.

Vainly does the teacher of formal English pursue his task if he neglects to illustrate, and illustrate copiously, every principle of good usage which he defines and inculcates. His textbook may give as examples of the common noun, "an oak, an ostrich, a florin." He will probably bring enlightenment sooner by substituting examples that appeal more readily to the child's existing stock of ideas, such as "an apple, a cat, a drum." But the Catholic child's existing stock of ideas has a considerable religious content which may profitably be utilized by the suggestion of such examples as "a crucifix, a priest, an altar." A commendable device employed by many teachers is to have the child illustrate the principles of formal English from the day's lessons in various textbooks. The lesson on the common noun will be

rendered definite and stimulating by having the children turn to their catechisms or Bible histories and from the lesson of the day select five to ten common nouns. This is a very simple form of correlation, but it will at least serve to establish some degree of association between grammar and religion.

In like manner the teacher of rhetoric, intent on illustrating that property of style which we call clearness, need not confine himself to Macaulay. Nearer at hand, and perhaps more to the purpose, is the Baltimore catechism which years ago his pupils learned by heart. Let him ask one of the familiar questions, have the answer written on the blackboard and then proceed to analyze it from the viewpoint of rhetorical clearness. The answer to the question, "What is venial sin?" affords ample material for the illustration of the rhetorical principles of clearness, distinction and proportion. Or is he seeking to impart the meaning of climax? He will be aided in his work by telling the class something about St. John Climacus, who wrote "*The Ladder of Perfection*" and so secured his name, and by reading aloud St. Paul's plea for charity — one of the finest examples of climax in universal literature. When such a method is followed the pupils will learn formal English; and they will also gain a valuable by-product in the form of numerous religious associations and suggestions which may profit them more than the regular lesson in Christian Doctrine. Some of the deepest impressions we get in life come to us by the way.

The Bible itself is a storehouse of admirable ex-

amples of rhetorical excellence. For a specimen of beauty we need but turn to the description of the Garden of Paradise or — in another vein — to St. John's wonderful picture wherein he gathers all that men account rare and precious and beautiful to adorn his vision of the New Jerusalem. The students will learn a salutary lesson of brevity by hearing the story of the creation as told in the Book of Genesis — a massive theme handled adequately in five hundred words. To illustrate the use of specific as opposed to generic terms in description, let them behold the Prophet Isaias paint with a brush of lambent fire the portrait of the promised Redeemer. As for sublimity, why go to Milton, why go to the conclusion of Pope's "Dunciad," when almost every day in the Mass is read that sublimest of all prose poems written by the poet-apostle, the beloved John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"? The widow Dido with a willow in her hand upon the shore of Carthage is a pathetic figure; but what a puny pathos is the emotion she evokes in comparison with the wave of feeling that flows over the heart at the sight of Job in the midst of his afflictions, Jeremias weeping hot, salt tears by the rivers of Babylon, Mary at the foot of the Cross! And as for urbanity, that fine flower and rare perfume of the flawless style, we shall look in vain for more potent examples of it than in the discourses of Our Lord to Nicodemus, to the sinful woman at the well, to the penitent thief — passages wherein the Perfect Gentleman reveals alike gentleness and gentility.

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION AND ÆSTHETIC APPRECIATION

THE student of literature and the teacher of literature must at the outset accept the truth that to the proper and complete absorption of a literary masterpiece a considerable degree of aesthetic appreciation is indispensable. Maurice de Guérin's little idyl of the Centaur and Shakespeare's delineation of the storm-buffed King Lear, Homer's description of the shield of Achilles and Calderón's *autos sacramentales*, different as they are in outlook, in scope, in quality and quantity of genius, have nevertheless several things in common; and one of those things is that they are all works of art, that they are all responses to our craving for the beautiful, that they are all, in short, susceptible of approach from the aesthetic point of view. A great book — or, indeed, a little book that is a book at all — may be something of a mine of information, something of a reservoir of practical wisdom, something, even, of a tract; but it is not literature unless, in addition, it is a thing of beauty. Literary study essentially, though not exclusively, is aesthetic study.

And yet this essential aesthetic element in literary appreciation is a thing of potential dangers. The

history of literature and the record of literary artists and literary appreciators furnish abundant evidence that when aesthetic study is undertaken in the light of false principles it defeats its own ends and degenerates in the artist into decadence and in the appreciator into arid formalism. We need but recall Apuleius and the Golden Ass, John Lily and the euphemistic school, Oscar Wilde and his prostitution of genius, and the career of certain nineteenth century apostles of art for art's sake to perceive that he who leans mainly or exclusively upon aesthetics in writing or in reading leans upon a slender reed. What is needed to conserve wholesomeness in the aesthetic approach to literature and to safeguard us against the morbid and the *précieuse*?

Clearly, it is the right sort of correlation with religion. If we base our literary study on faith and morality, if we investigate the problems of aesthetics in the light of established and authentic Catholic principles, if we observe a due measure of proportion and give God his rightful place in the world of His creation, then we shall avoid the errors both of excess and of defect. Once we give religion its due importance we shall on the one hand recognize the validity of the claims of aesthetic study and on the other we shall steer clear of the dangers of aesthetics gone mad. Religion is the salt which preserves from corruption and the leaven which lightens and vitalizes the mass.

We must freely recognize the unpleasant fact that not infrequently in the history of Christianity certain

men who have made profession of religion, men who in their personal lives and in their zeal for souls have merited the halo of sanctity, have in practice either utterly ignored the claims of the aesthetic viewpoint or even been listed as its forthright and implacable foes. After all, one can save one's soul, and help other people to save theirs, without the ministrations of art. But, however numerous such good men have been or are, their existence and their activity do not invalidate the nobility and the sacredness of aesthetic study. Men and movements that thus remain impervious to the appeal of beauty are not worthy on that account; they are worthy in spite of it.

Puritanism and Philistinism are fundamentally narrow and narrowing. When Carlyle said that English Puritanism locked the human mind in a dungeon he touched upon a particular manifestation of an eternal truth. For the Protestant Puritan or the Catholic Jansenist is in reality a man who sees God solely and exclusively as a God of Goodness; his eyes are held from the perception of God as Infinite Beauty. And neither the Puritan nor the Jansenist is a spent force, a mere historical phenomenon, a trailing shadow of the past; both are still alive and still active, and not the least important function of the Catholic school and the Catholic teacher is to combat the view of life and letters which prefers to regard beauty as nothing but a snare and aesthetic study as a wile of Satan. We are the heirs of the glorious Catholic ages, and not the least valuable portion of

our heritage is responsiveness to the lure of beauty.

The Catholic Church, immortal and unchanged, has preserved unto us the spirit of her Founder, and that spirit stands revealed in her prevailing attitude toward the principle of beauty through the years. What does that revelation teach us? It shows us the Church adorning herself with things of beauty as a bride preparing to meet her spouse. It shows us a liturgy making an almost startling aesthetic appeal. It shows us cathedrals that in their architectural structure and in their artistic embellishment are at once the models and the despair of builders and artificers and painters. It shows us musical geniuses devoting their gifts to the enriching of the externals of religion and sculptors and artists finding in Catholicism potent and enduring inspiration. It shows us poets like Dante and dramatists like Calderón and prosateurs like Chateaubriand and Newman lavishing upon religion the fullness of their talents and drawing from religion artistic power and finality. It shows us popes and potentates making every conceivable effort to encourage aesthetic effort and aesthetic appreciation. It shows us, in fine, that when rightly considered and legitimately employed, the beauty of the world and the beauty of art are the handmaidens of religion and that religion thrives and waxes strong as well as beautiful in an atmosphere of art.

That individuals at certain times and in certain places and in the stress of certain circumstances have been blind to this important aspect of the Catholic

spirit is no justification for us to follow their stultifying and un-Christian example. We need not judge them; but we must not imitate them. If we seek to carry the principles of our holy faith into ample and complete and fruitful practice, then must we perforce recognize, even in the interests of religion itself, the value and the enriching potentialities of aesthetic culture and seek to realize in ourselves, in our character, our outlook and our daily work, the wisdom and the godliness of loving and of cherishing the beauties to be found in the works of nature and in the works of art. For the artist, and not the saint alone, draws nigh unto God.

Religion, as we have said, will preserve us from the dangers inherent in the pernicious fallacy of art for art's sake. In books as in life aesthetics cannot be divorced from religion without the penalty of moral disintegration. The Irish writer, "John Eglinton," not a Catholic, yet a man of keen discernment and uncommon good sense, has said that the separation of literature from life on the art-for-art's-sake theory resembles "the declaration of a beauty past her prime that she will have nothing more to do with men." Men, obviously, will have nothing more to do with her. And so the view of aesthetic study that ignores its dependence on religion and on life has already sown the seeds of its own mortality. It is a barren thing and evil.

. This statement of the consequences of partition between religion and art is not merely a matter for

speculation. There are facts in plenty to support it. When we make a review of all the books of aesthetic theory and praxis that have come into the world, from Plato and Aristotle down to Mr. Paul Elmer More and Professor Irving Babbitt, we are impressed with the fact that those of the past that have really and vitally endured, and those of our own day that give earnest of more than a purely ephemeral appeal, are the books that have recognized the intimate relations of aesthetics and religion, the books that, in various ways and from divergent points of view have somehow mounted from the beauty of art to the Eternal Beauty and the Artist Infinite. The other books, the books that, however clever or plausible or scholarly, have ignored God and the things of God, that have concerned themselves solely with art as art, that have assumed aesthetic principles to be self-sufficient and omnipotent, are but as the spars and battered remnants of storm defaced ships cast helpless and futile upon the shores of life.

Such books have perished simply because they were inadequate and untrue. They have failed to live because they were never alive. And they were stillborn because they were not conceived in the light of those saving principles which religion alone has the power to formulate. For not by art alone does man live, and sin is not less sin when clad in soft garments. The life story of men like Paul Verlaine and Aubrey Beardsley bears impressive witness to our need of religion to satiate the ultimate hunger of

the human soul. A sane and wholesome interest in aesthetics will teach us to find beauty in unsuspected places, to train our senses and our hearts to recognize the beauties that lie round about us in books and in life, to fashion with hand and with voice things of beauty; and, above all, to see in all things beautiful a reflection, however imperfect, of the Beauty Supreme with Whom there is no change or shadow of alteration.

The beauty of a poem, the beauty of a landscape, the beauty of a human face, the beauty of a human emotion are all but various reflections of the Eternal Beauty, the Beauty which we call God. And the gardener busy amid his flower beds, and the writer toiling happily in the medium of plastic language, and the painter touching and retouching the colors on his canvas, are all three in this sense Godlike that they are imitating, however far off, the creative act of Him Who in the beginning said, "Let there be light," and light was made. The painter's colors may fade at the implacable touch of time, the writer's book may disappear in some mighty conflagration, the gardener's parterres may vanish to make room for an office building or a garage; but the beauty of the painting, of the written speech, of the flower beds can never be lost; it is an eternal thing, taking different forms, but itself indestructible. It cannot die, for it is the offspring of the Eternal God.

Upon the title page of every treatise on aesthetics might well be printed the inspired words: "The heavens shall grow old as a garment, and as a vesture

shalt Thou change them and they shall be changed; but Thou are the Selfsame, and Thy years shall not fail." Here we have embodied the true spirit of religion, of Catholicism. Here we have the principle that animated the great painters and sculptors and poets who found in religion their most congenial themes and brought to the Church the offerings of their genius as children bring flowers to Our Lady's altar in the sunlit month of May. And here we have the spirit in which the Catholic teacher in the Catholic school must approach and carry on the aesthetic appreciation of literature. It is the spirit that wordlessly but unmistakably speaks; God made the world and saw that it was good. And the beauty He saw in the world of His creation not all the malice of the devil, not all the foulness of human sin, can destroy utterly or permanently obscure. Beauty is of God; beauty is God; and when we grow apace in the perception of beauty, and in the accomplishment of beauty, then verily grow we like unto Him.

This illuminating truth Dante understood when in the closing cantos of his "Paradiso" he achieved the richness and potency and surpassing splendor of sheer beauty, and all through the suggestion of eternal light. And another poet and seer understood it, too, when he wrote: "The form of this world passes; and I would fain occupy myself with that only which constitutes abiding relations."

Those *bleibende Verhältnisse* of Goethe, revealed in every world masterpiece of letters, are likewise

the basic principle of every sound and vital theory of aesthetics. For, in the ultimate view of the matter, they resolve themselves into the God of Beauty and Goodness and Love.

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION AND VITAL APPRECIATION

THE vital aspect is the fundamental aspect in literary appreciation. Formal study and aesthetic study both have their importance, but of themselves they lead not to the heart of books. For the heart of books is the heart of life, and he who would learn to know and evaluate a literary production which in any serious sense can claim consideration as a work of art must learn first to study it in its relations to life. Without the vital aspect literature becomes merely an ornamental thing like a molding or a utilitarian thing like an arch; the living word becomes a fossil. Fruitful study of literature recognizes the vital element therein; it recognizes great books as portraits and interpretations of the life of man.

And, similarly, the religious aspect is the fundamental aspect in life. Man has been bidden to seek first the Kingdom of God and His Justice; and even were we disposed to ignore that command and the authority whence it comes, we could not, as consistent thinkers, ignore either its practical applications or its philosophical validity. And turning alike from the Church and from the schools, and appealing to the experience of the race and the consensus of human

experience, we should still recognize the importance, the fundamental importance, of the rôle played by religion alike in the history of nations and in the career of individual men. "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God,'" is significant in its literary not less than in its religious implications; for in books as in life the height of absurdity is the denial of the claims of the Creator on the creature. The wasted life, the futile life, is the non-religious life. It is such a life that, in the words of the world's master dramatist, is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.

Religion and literature have, indeed, so many things in common and touch life simultaneously at so many points that they have been sometimes thought to be identical, or at least certain manifestations of religion and certain forms of literature have been assumed to be but one and the same thing. Thus Professor George Santayana of Harvard University, states the essential idea of his book, "Poetry and Religion," in the following words from the preface:

" . . . Religion and poetry are identical in essence, and differ merely in the way in which they are attached to practical affairs. Poetry is called religion when it intervenes in life, and religion, when it merely supervenes upon life, is seen to be nothing but poetry. . . . As religion is deflected from its course when it is confused with a record of facts or of natural laws, so poetry is arrested in its development if it remains an unmeaning play of fancy without relevance

to the ideals and purposes of life. In that relevance lies its highest power. As its elementary pleasantness comes from its response to the demands of the ear, so its deepest beauty comes from its response to the ultimate demands of the soul."

The two root statements of this chapter — that the vital aspect in literature is its fundamental aspect and that the religious aspect in life is its fundamental aspect — suggest the root principles governing the making of books, the teaching of books and the appreciation of books. Writing, teaching and creative reading are all successful in the degree in which they recognize that literature interprets life and that religion illumines, explains and vivifies life.

The root principles thus drawn from the essential relations and inter-relations of life, literature and religion may be reduced to four: First, that religion is essential to the making of literature; secondly, that religion is a constructive force in literature; thirdly, that religion is an indispensable aid to the appreciation of literature; and, finally, that our appreciation of literature grows in proportion as our sense of religion widens and deepens.

1. It must be conceded, of course, that a perception, however vivid and searching, of the religious implications of human life does not of itself constitute a literary perception, otherwise every hymn would be a poem, every tract would be a masterpiece, every sermon would be a work of art. The formal and the aesthetic elements are necessary; but granted the

presence of manner and mood in a sufficiently ample measure, that presence will not of itself constitute literature. The vital element is likewise necessary, and the expression of the vital element is incomplete and incoherent with a free and full recognition of the religious aspect of man's life and destiny.

This theoretical view, the product of deductive reasoning, is validated by inductive observation. For all we need do is to pass in review the books and the authors that are accepted as classics, the books and the authors that are acknowledged to be surpassingly and permanently great, and we shall find in all of them and in each of them — despite difference in time and variety of mood and divergence of outlook — a recognition of religion and an insistence on the importance of the religious aspect in the life of man. The gods of Homer and Virgil have little in common with the God of Dante and Calderón, and the moral preachments of the Book of Job are not always consonant with those of "Sartor Resartus"; but in every literary masterpiece, no matter by what hand penned or in what age produced, there is a voicing of religious ideals and a formulation of religious truths. This is so because, since the prime function of literature is to interpret life, it must perforce concern itself with what is, and ever has been, the dominant interest in life, the religious interest.

2. The presence of the religious element in the great books of the world must of necessity be admitted by all who know, even superficially, the master-

pieces of literature; but not all students accept that religious element as a positive, as a constructive force in either literature or life. Confronted with an epoch in history, like the Middle Ages, when the religious interest absorbs so much thought and vitality, some students might claim that but for religion the Middle Ages would have made more extensive and more beneficial contributions to civilization; confronted with an individual writer like Dante Alighieri, who so deeply and so minutely stressed many aspects of religious interest, they might exclaim, "That is precisely what is the matter with him!" Such critics recognize, as perforce they must, the magnitude of the rôle played by religion in human civilization and the invariable presence of religious elements in literature; but they are quick to argue that the world without religion would be a finer and happier world, that literature without religion would be a collection of greater books.

With the rôle played by religion in history we have here no immediate concern, but to the objectors who claim to find religion a destructive and debilitating force in either life or books, we need only analyze the data in the white light of truth. Let us face theories with facts. And, insofar as literature is concerned, insofar as any individual writer is concerned, the facts unmistakably and emphatically point to the conclusion that absorption in religious problems, devotion to religious issues and adherence to religious truths have aided rather than hindered the evolution

of literature and the development of individual writers. We recall a literary form which at first sight seems to have the least connection with religion — the drama; yet even a hasty investigation of dramatic origins will demonstrate that the drama is indebted to religion for its very existence. In Greece, in Spain, even in England — when England was Merrie England — the drama found in dogma, morals and worship both its inception and its inspiration.

And the constructive rôle played by religion in evolving a literary form is equally manifest in the growth and potency of individual writers. Religion — specifically Catholicism — is the very warp and woof of one of the three supreme poets of all time, Dante. Was it a deterrent power, an inhibiting obsession, an inner check, a ball and chain dragging at his ankle? Rather was it a liberating force, an inspiring enthusiasm, a pair of wings enabling him to transcend ordinary human experience and mount undaunted even unto the stars. Religion made Dante; and in proportion as, in one or other of its manifold manifestations, it appealed to them, it made likewise Sophocles and Plato, Shakespeare and Milton, Goethe and Molière.

3. Dryasdust scholarship studies books from the outside; it busies itself with dates of publication, with parallel passages, with masculine and feminine endings; it involves a rule of thumb process of criticism in which there is no spark of living reality. Vital scholarship, on the other hand, studies books from the

inside; it follows the current of ideas, it re-creates the moods in which those ideas had their source, it reconstructs by means of sympathetic imagination the human life whence the books have sprung and of which they are embodiments. Dryasdust scholarship may indeed proceed without any very keen and thrilling religious perceptions. But true, vital appreciation stands in need at every turn of the indispensable aids which religion, and religion alone, can furnish. Awareness of religion, sensitiveness to the appeals of religion, sympathy with the manifold manifestations of religion are indispensable to the study of books from the inside. Religion, as we have seen, has played a considerable part in the construction of the world's literature; religion must play a not less prominent part in the reconstruction of the world's literature.

As an instance. What, if not a religious interest, can enable us to evaluate, to appreciate Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven?" Without religious sympathies, without religious convictions, how could we possibly study that poem from the inside, how reconstruct the mood that inspired its making, how verify its essential truth to human life? To get at the heart of "The Hound of Heaven" we must realize what the eminent Protestant divine, Phillips Brooks, meant when he said, "The way to escape from God is to escape into Him"; we must recall the glowing tribute paid by Thomas a' Kempis to the surpassing excellence of Divine Love; we must meditate on the searching scriptural saying that perfect

love casteth out fear. Only then do we perceive that "The Hound of Heaven" is more than a bit of rhetorical efflorescence, more than a metrical symphony, more than a rhapsody of words; only then do we perceive that the poem is a human document, a transcript of universal human experience, that it is, in Milton's scintillating and undying phrase, "the precious lifeblood of a master spirit."

4. Our fourth principle governing the vital appreciation of literature in the light of religion is really a corollary of the third. For since religion helps us the better to understand and to reconstruct great books, obviously the more intimately we incorporate in ourselves the spirit of religion the richer is our equipment for literary study. To study literature, to teach literature is in a sense to re-make literature. Religion helped in the making; it must help as well in the re-making.

Here, as I see it, is the teeming advantage of the Catholic teacher and the Catholic school. For the Catholic teacher is generally by profession a religious, a person who carries the principles of religious perfection into fruitful practice by means of his vows and his rules and his philosophy of life; and the Catholic school is an institution upreared and sustained through devotion to religion, an institution which finds in religion the very reason for its existence. Given the requisite scholarly equipment, given the necessary technical skill, I can conceive of no better teacher of literature than the Catholic teacher. Within the

classroom of the Catholic school he is free to impart to his pupils a comprehension of vital criticism in its theory and its practice, a zest and an enthusiasm for books as reproductions of life and commentaries on life.

But in order that we may read literature and teach literature with due insistence on its vital connotations it is imperative that, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, we learn more about God and the things of God. In the great books of the world sincerity is the virtue paramount; in them the little reticences and hypocrisies and dissimulations of daily intercourse are thrust aside and the human soul stands forth in the sight of God, gloriously naked as once Adam and Eve stood in Paradise. The student, the teacher, must re-capture that sublime sincerity, must learn to strip life of its unessentials, must grasp the heavenly secret of seeing things as they are in truth. Seeing things as they are in truth is of the very essence of religion.

CHAPTER VIII

RELIGION AND POETRY

THE teacher of literature in the Catholic school, however dubious he may be concerning the possibilities of correlation between religion and — let us say — algebra, will require no outside stimulus to recognize the closeness, the interdependence of religion and poetry. He will perceive, on the one hand, that no really great poem ever came into existence that lacked a pronounced religious element; and on the other, that the finest and rarest and most sublime expressions of the religious spirit very frequently take poetic form. God can no more be banished from the world's great poetry than He can be banished from His mundane creation itself; and brief is the flight of the winged steed unless his pinions beat the air of religious enthusiasm and moral truth. Religion aids in the production and the enjoyment of poetry; and poetry aids in the formulation and the practice of religion.

These are obvious truths, all but truisms. Yet two causes tend to blind the eyes of some of us to the interdependence of religion and poetry. The first cause is irreligious propaganda. Among critics, particularly among the water flies of the craft, are to be found men who seek, sometimes sadly and ponderously,

sometimes flippantly and blatantly, to deny the validity of religious phenomena in life itself; and in consequence they find themselves substantially coerced into attempting to explain away the religious element in literature. All criticism, as the brilliant Anatole France has pointed out, is essentially autobiographical; the critic is not likely to find in literature what is absent from his personal conception of human life. And accordingly, if the critic regards religion in actual life as a dream, a delusion, a superstition, he is not likely to be deeply impressed with the manifestations of religion that he finds in the *Iliad*, for example, or the poems of Herbert and Crashaw. Religion to him means nothing intimate, nothing vital, nothing supremely important; and so in his comments on literature, made in his capacity of writer or teacher, he dismisses the religious note in poetry with either a shrug or a curse, according to the temperamental leanings of his irreligious convictions.

The second cause of the failure to perceive the interdependence of religion and poetry is, among us Catholics, even more common. Religion has inspired some of the grandest poems in the world; but, unfortunately, it has also inspired some of the sorriest drivel. Well meaning but utterly incompetent men and women — poets neither born nor made — have time and again sought to record their religious reactions in verse. Now, while no fault may be found with their religious concepts and emotions, grave exceptions may be taken to the expression of those

concepts and emotions. A man may be altogether orthodox and edifyingly devout, and yet evolve a poem that is fearfully and wonderfully made. Witness the verses sometimes appearing in religious magazines, witness the conventional obituary ode, witness many of the hymns embalmed in standard hymnals. If, and this is not an utterly improbable assumption, our experience of religious poetry has been confined mainly to such very religious but lamentably unliterary poetical effusions, it is not surprising that we should form the opinion that religion does not constitute a fit subject for poetical treatment.

If our pupils fail to recognize the interdependence of religion and poetry, if they fail to perceive that religion is an aid to poetry and that poetry is an aid to religion, we teachers face the task of removing from their eyes the scales of misunderstanding and prejudice. And this we can do in two ways: First, we can prove, from a general survey of the world's supreme poems, that the religious element has been stressed by the greatest and most enduring of the poets; and secondly, we can show, from a similar survey of the distinctly religious books of the world, that the spirit of religion has demanded poetical expression and embodiment.

In the rudest folk ballads and in the most primitive epics the religious note is so prevailingly sounded that the early songs of all peoples constitute a veritable Twilight of the Gods. The metrical romances are deeply religious in form and in content; and an

essentially religious theme and a distinctively religious treatment characterize Dante's "*Divina Commedia*" and Milton's "*Paradise Lost*." The religious note in great measure explains the poetical excellence of Browning and Tennyson, and in great measure explains the poetical limitations of Keats and Byron. The presence of religious convictions goes far to elevate a moderate talent, as in the case of Longfellow; the absence of religious convictions goes far to negative the claims of an exceptional talent, as in the case of Leopardi. Poetry is an interpretation of life; but it cannot be a dependable and all-embracing interpretation when it ignores what in every age of the world the vast majority of men, and the vast majority of thinking men, have regarded as the most important aspect of life.

Within reach of me as I write are two compact religious libraries. One is 'a collection of fourteen volumes called, "*The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*." The other is the Holy Bible. In these two libraries — for the Bible is really a library and not a single book — we have the quintessence of the religious expression of the human race. And we have but to open almost any of these books at random to discover that the religious experience of the race, particularly, but not exclusively, in its emotional manifestations, demands and achieves a poetical form. Poetry of exceptional force and beauty are the Egyptian hymns, dating from 1600 B.C. to 525 B.C., like "*To Aton, the Creator*" and "*To Re as Sole*

God ”; and poetry, too, is the poignantly beautiful Twenty-Second Psalm¹ and the sublime introductory passage of the Fourth Gospel. Religion, rightly understood, touches the human heart more profoundly than any other aspect of life; and what thus profoundly touches the human heart craves poetical expression.

No theory should be pressed beyond its proper limits; and so, while we are justified in insisting on the interdependence of religion and poetry, we must not confuse the issue by assuming that poetry and religion are co-extensive. A poem may be a true poem, and yet possess no religious element; such a poem is Keats's "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer." And a manifestation of religious truth may be in every respect an authentic utterance and yet bear no approximation to poetry; a book of dogmatic theology, for example, could hardly be mistaken for a book of poems. And, similarly, just as poetry is in no sense a substitute for religion, so religion is in no sense a substitute for poetry. Interdependence does not imply identity, or similarity of function; but it does imply a vital relationship and a common field of activity.

The vital relationship of religion and poetry inheres in the illuminating truth that both are manifestations of God, that both are avenues of approach unto God. Poetry is essentially an appeal to the

¹ Better known as the Twenty-Third Psalm as given in the Protestant English Bible: "The Lord is my Shepherd."

emotions of man, especially to his thirst for fineness, for sublimity, for beauty. Now, God is Infinite Beauty. Ultimately, the reason why we human beings need poetry, why we make poetry, why we seek in poetry consolation and delight, is summarized in the immortal — and eminently poetical — words of the Psalmist: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so doth my soul pant after Thee, O God." The beauty of the great poem is caught from the Ideal Beauty; it is a reflection, necessarily fleeting and imperfect, of the Face of the Creator.

And religion is likewise a manifestation, a reflection of God. It is more extensive than poetry, since it responds, not merely to our human craving for beauty, but also and with equal fullness, to our craving for knowledge and our zest for action. Most erroneous views of the nature and functions of religion are inadequate rather than perverted. Thus, one man conceives of religion solely as dogma, as something intellectual; another, as something solely emotional; another, as something solely volitional. Religion, rightly understood, appeals to the whole man, to man knowing, to man feeling, to man willing. It is a reflection of God — now of God as Knowledge and Law, now of God as Love and Beauty, now of God as Creative Force and Infinite Activity.

Though diverse in function, religion and poetry have a common field of operation; and that common field is human nature. Both are, each in its own sphere, lights and guides and inspirations to man. And often

they supplement and confirm and reinforce each other; that is what is meant by their interdependence.

Of that mutual aid, of that interdependence, we have in Catholic theology and Catholic literature a most felicitous illustration. On the one hand, a learned Dominican monk, a man exceptionally gifted of intellect and exceptionally favored with opportunities of scholarly research, compiles a masterly theological treatise, a compendium of what the Church teaches in her capacity as representative of God and Teacher of Mankind. The result is the "Summa" of St. Thomas Aquinas. On the other hand, an equally learned layman, a man of extraordinary emotional temper, a man privileged to love ideally and to suffer much, evolves a poetical masterpiece, a vast cathedral of song beneath whose vaulted arches succeeding generations of men may find inspiration and surcease. The result is the "Divina Commedia" of Dante. Both works are massive works. Both are directly and intimately concerned with the life of man, with the vision of sin, with the nature of love, with the relations of God to the works of His hands. One is the highest achievement of theology, the science of religion; the other is the highest achievement of poetry.

The interdependence of the "Summa" of St. Thomas and the "Divina Commedia" of Dante is typical of the interdependence of religion and poetry. For, the student of St. Thomas, if he would adequately appreciate his text, must sedulously peruse the

"*Divina Commedia*"; and the student of Dante, if in any but a superficial sense he is a student at all, must construct, for the elucidation of the poem, an elaborate series of footnotes from the "*Summa*." Let us content ourselves with two specific instances.

Assume that a theological student is investigating St. Thomas's teachings regarding the Sacrament of Penance. He will there find substantially all that the Catholic Church holds concerning contrition, confession and satisfaction. He will find a satisfying intellectual statement of orthodox theology. And now let him turn to the "*Purgatorio*," especially to the ninth canto, wherein Dante, with Virgil — symbolic of human reason — as his guide, draws nigh to the gate of Purgatory, mounts the three steps to the adamantine threshold, and listens to the explanation given by the angel concerning the power of the keys. There the theological student may find nothing new; but he will find what he already knows illuminated by poetry, by truth transfused with emotion. And what he knows he will hereafter know in a new way.

And assume that a literary student is wrestling with the sixteenth canto of the "*Purgatorio*," that he is digesting as best he can the pregnant and sublime discourse of Marco Lombardo on free will. Despite his best intentions, despite his most earnest efforts, his impressions of Dante's meaning will be but fragmentary and vague, until he turns to the corresponding section of the "*Summa*" and gets, from the intellectual, from the theological point of view, the

Angelic Doctor's teachings regarding liberty of choice. From the poetical point of view, St. Thomas wrote a commentary on Dante; from the theological point of view, Dante wrote a commentary on St. Thomas.

A lengthy list could be compiled of poems, great and little, written by Catholics and by non-Catholics, by clerics and by laymen, in which this interdependence of religion and poetry is most happily illustrated. It is the office of the Catholic teacher in the Catholic school to recognize the kinship and to emphasize it in his teaching. That is a need imperative of our day and generation. As Francis Thompson, a man whose own poetry is so superbly infused with the Catholic spirit, wrote in his essay on Shelley:

"The Church, which was once the mother of poets no less than of saints, during the last two centuries has relinquished to aliens the chief glories of poetry, if the chief glories of holiness she has preserved for her own. The palm and the laurel, Dominic and Dante, sanctity and song, grew together in her soil: she has retained the palm, but forgone the laurel. Poetry in its widest sense, and when not professedly irreligious, has been too much and too long among many Catholics either misprized or distrusted. . . . Once poetry was, as she should be, the lesser sister and helpmate of the Church; the minister to the mind, as the Church to the soul. . . . The separation has been ill for poetry; it has not been well for religion."

CHAPTER IX

RELIGION AND THE DRAMA

ONE Good Friday many years ago a small boy went to church. He was in many respects a typical Catholic lad, born into a devout family, a pupil at the parochial school, a fairly regular attendant at evening devotions. But this was the first time that he had had the privilege of witnessing the whole of the Good Friday ceremonial. When the gospel came and the three deacons began to chant the story of Our Lord's Passion as told by St. John, the small boy was thrilled, enraptured. He gained an understanding of the matter in a very short time. One chanter was Our Lord, another told the story and the third was everybody else. It was wonderful. He closed his eyes and in imagination lived over the scenes in the garden and in the court of the high priest. Why, it was just like going to the theater!

Like going to the theater? That mental association horrified the small boy. He had gone to the theater several times in his life, but it had been considered as something almost wrong to do; anyhow, he knew there must be bad theaters, because he had read about them in the examinations of conscience in his prayerbook. And here he was in church, and on

Good Friday too, enjoying that wonderful inner feeling that heretofore he had secured only in the theater. He opened his eyes, shook his head. He felt he had been guilty of entertaining bad thoughts. And he listened to the rest of the chanting in his usual patient, lifeless way, and presently was remarking to himself how long the process dragged itself out, and wondering where little Willie Jones in the seat in front of him got that awful haircut, and hoping that the local baseball team would get good weather for Sunday's opening game.

I can vouch for substantially all the details of the small boy's Good Friday experience, for I had an account of it only a few days ago from his own lips. He is a zealous and accomplished priest; and as he sat by the open window and smiled out across the hills, he expressed the hope that the parents and teachers of a later generation do not make the mistake of condemning all manifestations of the dramatic instinct in the face of the fact that Mother Church encourages and utilizes and perpetuates that instinct in her soulful and impressive liturgy.

I think this recital will prove of value to the Catholic teacher. The teachers in the school which that boy attended may have been teaching Shakespeare; but they certainly were not teaching in a practical way the nature and the implications of what some people like to call "dramatics." They had school plays periodically, too; but the children were never taught to associate the characteristics and im-

pressions of those plays with the ceremonies of the Mass, with the chanting of Vespers. Let us learn from those teachers' mistakes. Let us in this and the following chapter dwell on the drama and the dramatic form in relation to religion and morality and worship.

First of all, the dramatic instinct — the instinct that urges us to play, to impersonate, to act out, to make believe — is a legitimate human instinct. Most of the things we learned in childhood we learned through its instrumentality; most of the things we enjoyed in childhood were associated with it. Only last evening I overheard the conversation of two little lads in the park. One had a coaster, the other had a toy rifle. Said the owner of the rifle: "When you come down this path next time, you must bring a big rock or a hunk or dirt or something. That will be a piece of gold. I'll be a robber and hide behind this tree and stand you up and take it away from you." "All right," agreed the make-believe stage driver. "But you'll shoot me, and I'll crawl away wounded, and then I'll be a policeman and I'll come and catch you and lock you up." Time did not permit me to witness the consummation of this thrilling drama in which poetic justice was apparently to be rigidly vindicated.

Now the teacher will make no mistake when he insists that it is in such a spirit that Shakespeare is to be read, that a class play is to be acted, that a history lesson is to be studied, that — with appropriate reverence — the children are to assist at the

Holy Sacrifice. If the average altar boy could be brought to realize that when he serves at Mass he is an actor in the most wonderful and impressive drama in the world, undoubtedly his devotion would be increased; possibly his responses would be almost intelligible.

When we are explaining the ceremonies connected with the administration of the sacraments, such as Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders, let us make it very clear that those ceremonies make a direct appeal to the dramatic instinct. Thus in Baptism, the sponsors bring the child to the Church and in his name ask for the grace of the sacrament. The priest, as the representative of the Church, tests the candidate's dispositions. Then, step by step the drama proceeds, the application of the salt, the renunciation of the devil, the making of the vows, all leading up to the grand climax of the pouring of the water. The ceremonies of Baptism constitute a splendidly constructed drama, impressive in its suggestions, inferences and associations.

Much the same thing may be said of our most familiar prayers. Take, for instance, the Confiteor. The individual soul, conscious of its weakness and its unworthiness, approaches the high court of Heaven. Saints and angels numberless are ranged about the throne of the great King. And the soul, throwing itself down in the presence of that splendid company, makes its humble avowal of guilt, to God, to the Most Blessed Mother, to individual angels and saints, to all

the assemblage of the blessed. It bows lower and lower, the dramatic contrast of its own sinfulness with the purity of the just making itself more and more vivid. And from the beautiful climax of "mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa," it rises to a series of invocations, fittingly concluding with an appeal for intercession before the Lord our God. A realization on the part of the pupils of the essentially dramatic form of this beautiful prayer will prevent its recitation from degenerating into a monotonous and meaningless singsong. And the same principle applied to the Our Father, to the Hail Mary, to the Litany of the Saints, to the Act of Contrition will serve to make and keep those prayers interesting, vital and salutary.

All this is one-half of the possibilities of correlation between religion and the drama, the half that takes cognizance of the dramatic element in the religious content. The other half recognizes the religious and moral element in the dramatic form.

The teacher who would reduce this second sort of correlation to fruitful classroom practice must recall the oft told but rarely realized truth that in both ancient and modern times the drama was born at the foot of the altar; that the most primitive plays among all peoples were associated with religious ceremonies; that the mysteries, miracle plays and moralities of the Middle Ages constituted a connecting link between the distinctively religious drama of the Mass on the one hand and the secular and even non-religious drama

of the modern theater on the other. He must recall that poetic justice, which is an invariable motive in the serious drama — the drama of Sophocles, of Calderón, of Shakespeare — is in some sort an application of religious principles. He must recall that the drama — even if it be so slight a thing as the puppet play of “Punch and Judy” — has invariably concerned itself with moral issues. Punch, be it remembered, is an exuberantly wicked individual who riotously beats his wife, joyously kills the policeman, enthusiastically flings his crying baby out of the window and in general conducts himself after a fashion that no self-respecting Christian can approve; but some sort of nemesis ultimately overtakes him, for a crocodile or the devil — I have seen both versions — gets him in the end.

The teacher must furthermore recall that the dramatist, especially the great dramatist, must be a teacher of morality. He may be consciously so, like Calderón, or unconsciously so, as was probably the case with Shakespeare; but he cannot be blind to moral issues and implications. For his function is to embody human life and character in terms of objective action and by means of contrast, to portray and interpret the ways and deeds and words and thoughts of men; and these things can never be separated from the moral law. And if the dramatist deals with Christian times and Christian influences — as Shakespeare does in “Hamlet” and Schiller in “Maria Stuart” — he must perforce, be his personal

opinions and predilections what they may, embody Catholic aspects and customs and atmosphere. Whether the man Shakespeare believed in Purgatory or not is a mooted point, in spite of Father Bowden's excellent study;¹ but he most certainly made the Ghost of Hamlet's father believe in Purgatory. Schiller, as is well known, was not a Catholic; but he could not refrain from making Mary Queen of Scots a Catholic, and a great one.

As an instance of how this form of correlation may be attained in actual practice, let us offer a few points contributory to a study of Shakespeare's "Macbeth" from the religious point of view:

1. The ethical theme of the play. Were we to summarize the play in abstract terms, to tell in a few words what it is all about, we should necessarily formulate our impressions somewhat like this: *The evil desire is punished by the attainment of its object.* Macbeth wants to be king, and that is not in itself wrong; but since he includes in the wish a consent to the use of unlawful means, the desire becomes vitiated. And he is accordingly punished — not by the avenging hand of an angel, not by a mysterious sickness, not mainly even by remorse, but precisely by getting what he wants. "Better be with the dead," he cries, "whom we to gain our peace have sent to peace."

¹ "The Religion of Shakespeare," by Henry Sebastian Bowden.

2. **The psychology of temptation.** The Weird Sisters in this play represent temptation. They are rightly characterized by Macbeth as "supernatural solicitings." They are evoked, in the first place, by the man's predisposition. They promise much and give little; they flatter, cajole and betray. They influence, yet do not wholly dominate the will of their victim, for Macbeth is a free agent. And, when they have served their purpose they become in his eyes "secret, black and midnight hags."

3. **The progression in crime.** Lady Macbeth deluded herself and her unfortunate husband by saying, "A little water clears us of this deed; how easy is it, then!" But ultimately she perceives and he perceives that the initial crime necessitates other criminal acts, that it is but the evocation of a host of demoniac furies who plunge them deeper and deeper in the bloody mire of guilt. Macbeth continues to plot and slay, not because he finds delight in sinning, but because he has stepped in so far that, should he "wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er." Sin leaves its everlasting mark. "All the perfumes of Arabia cannot sweeten this little hand."

4. **The weakening of the moral sense.** Before the first crime, Macbeth hesitated, reflected, wavered, dallied, changed and rechanged his mind. He makes less ado over the murder of Banquo, still less over the murder of MacDuff's wife and children. He has become case-hardened. He wonders at himself, toward the close of the play, that he can be so callous.

5. The partnership in crime, the isolation in punishment. Before the killing of the king, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth worked and thought and planned together. But from the very moment when the murderer reels into the courtyard with the bloody daggers in his hands, he and his wife are separated for evermore. When he speaks of the voice he heard saying, "Sleep no more," she becomes conscious of that direful isolation. "What do you mean?" she cries; and she is destined never to know. No longer do they think together, plan together, kill together; they are denied even the dubious consolation of suffering together, of dying together. Both have sinned against a law of life and each must walk the ways of death alone.

CHAPTER X

THE DRAMA AND LIFE

LET us suppose that an unsophisticated visitor from Mars were to visit the city of New York — the city that is popularly supposed to set the example in affairs theatrical for the entire country — and investigate in his thoroughgoing Martian manner the dramatic offerings of the Great White Way. As he emerges from the last of the many theaters in the vicinity of the Winter Garden, let us suppose that he falls into the arms and the good graces of a devout and learned priest who takes the Martian to a nearby presbytery and teaches him, with commendable patience and thoroughness, the main lines of moral theology and the practice of the Catholic religion. Then the man from Mars, his furlough having expired, sets out in his interplanetary biplane for the sphere that he calls home. He meditates on the way. He knows a good deal about the modern theater; and he knows a good deal about the rôle of religion in earthly life. Do you think he would be likely to establish a very intimate connection between the two?

Frankly, I don't think he would. Doubtless, he could recall an occasional play or two that seemed to be mainly intent upon moral issues; but he would

be forced to conclude that the vast generality of modern dramatic offerings in the city of New York have very little to do with the things that pertain to religion and the spiritual life. And if, just about the time he reaches home, he receives a wireless message to the effect that the drama is studied and taught in Catholic schools, he would probably wonder very much at the seeming anomaly. What conceivable relation, he might well ask himself, is there between the drama and Catholic education?

That question has been asked by persons other than the Martian, by persons who have shared his experiences and drawn his conclusions. The experiences have been authentic and the conclusions logical—as far as they go. And yet, in point of fact, there *is* an intimate connection between the drama and religion. Why cannot the Martian, and his earthly analogons, perceive that connection? Because both he and they have fallen into the very obvious mistake of assuming that the status of the theater in the city of New York in the present year of grace is representative of the status of the theater in all other places and at all other times. Our Martian has unconsciously, and therefore pathetically, assumed a limited, a foreshortened, a provincial outlook. He has failed to see the forest for the trees. He has failed to reflect on what is the nature, the essence of the drama. And he has, above all and most important of all, failed to study the high water marks in the history of the theater.

It is just possible that some good Catholic teachers have imitated his error. It is just possible that the energy of their denunciation of the theater is in inverse ratio to the extent of their knowledge of dramatic history. It is just possible that they have heard much about bad plays — plays bad in every sense of the word — and know very little about good plays. It is just possible that their opinions anent the theater and the drama are founded on random conjectures and second-hand criticisms. It is just possible that they judge the drama by the worst specimens of dramatic art, and that they are about as logical as the separated brother who condemns the Catholic Church as untrue and unholy because he happens to know an individual Catholic who cheats at cards and tells obscene stories.

What, after all, is the drama? It is a natural, an inevitable manifestation of the play instinct, of the let-us-make-believe mood that hath its hour with every man. When the children on the front steps start to play house, they are doing something dramatic. When little Ralph sticks feathers in his hair and stains his face with brick dust in order to play Indian, he is doing something dramatic. When little Clara borrows one of her mother's cast-off dresses and solemnly parades down the sidewalk in the guise of a grown woman, she is doing something dramatic. Nor does the play instinct fall away from us with childhood. Rather, it grows stronger and more insistent. And we grown-ups recognize the wisdom of gratifying

it, and we direct it and specialize it. The only notable difference between the play of children and the play of men is this, that *all* the children are actors and none of the children are audience, whereas relatively few of the men are actors and most of them are spectators; they find refreshment and recreation and education in acting, but in acting vicariously.

In essentials, in fact, little Ralph is as much a dramatist as William Shakespeare. Both take some idea that looms large in their minds and embody that idea in some form of objective action. That is what little Ralph does when he plays Indian; that is what Shakespeare does when he constructs "Hamlet." And each of them, according to the truth, the profundity, the artistic skill of the embodiment, shows what manner of person he is. In range of vision, in breadth of conception, in knowledge of life, in technical efficiency, Shakespeare shows himself a better dramatist than little Ralph; but it is a difference in degree, not in kind.

In our Catholic schools we do not teach and study the drama of little Ralph, any more than we teach and study the current drama of New York's Great White Way; but we do teach and study the drama of Shakespeare. And why? Simply because in that drama we find certain truths of life — notably moral and religious truths — conveyed to us in the form of objective action; simply because the right study of the dramatic masterpieces of all countries and all times will yield us a rich and practical harvest in the

form of increased knowledge of human life and increased incentive for living in accordance with the highest and noblest ideals. Thus does the drama correlate with morality and religion.

Potentially at all times, actually at numerous stages in its highly interesting history, the drama is a great moral force. It preaches and it teaches; and it does both by example. It deals in a concrete way with concrete moral issues. The stuff whereof it is made is the passions of the human heart — love and combativeness and reverence and revenge and devotion and ambition and joy and remorse. Our schools exist that we may teach the rising generation how to develop and guide the passions, how to place them under the complete control of a will which is in turn harmonized with the Divine Will. And among the educational agencies at our disposal in carrying on this salutary work, the world's great dramas occupy a prominent place.

"The drama," writes Mr. Denton J. Snider, "unfolds what is contained in the deed, the total cycle of it, in all its consequences, showing the world built by the individual day by day, built of his own conduct, the world which he must live in. . . . Man makes his own world and must dwell in it, be it Heaven or Hell. Deed after deed he piles up like so many stones in the temple of life; he cannot escape from his deed which is the outer living reality of himself, his own personality made into his own spiritual dwelling-place. He must live in his own world, not in that of

anybody else; if he perishes in it or through it, his death is his own act, or the fruit thereof. In tragic seriousness, in comic sportfulness, there is the same fundamental trait of Shakespeare: man summoned to the presence of his deed and judged by it, with reward, punishment or forgiveness."

The really great drama, furthermore, is and must be moral. It is moral, not only in the sense of being concerned with moral issues, but in the specific sense of being rightly concerned with such issues, in the sense of teaching those principles and actions which are in accordance with the recognized laws of morality. In other words, the great play, with much of the unction and all of the intensity and more of the objective appeal of the great sermon, impresses us with the importance of right living, with the wisdom of self-control, with the folly of misdirected passion, with the holiness of purity, with the sacredness of truth. This it does, not because moral influence is necessarily its conscious aim, but because it is thoroughly and profoundly true to life. It seeks to show life and to interpret life, to tell the truth, the whole truth, about life; and the whole truth, the significant truth, about life is moral truth.

Let us take one instance out of many of the searching, penetrating way in which the drama tells the whole truth about life. It is admitted that in the actual scheme of existence, in the life we know and lead, in the life we read about in history and biography, woman plays and always has played an

important if unobtrusive part. By woman — some woman — to a large extent every man is made or marred. Marc Anthony ruined himself because of a woman; King Louis IX of France became a saint largely because of the influence of a woman, his mother, Blanche of Castile. Even such ascetic, rigorous types of sanctity as St. Jerome and St. John of the Cross were indebted to women like St. Paula and St. Teresa for encouragement and inspiration. Our French friends are characteristically flippant in form and solid in substance when they advise us to “find the woman.”

Now, can anybody recall a solitary great play of the world — in Greece, in Spain, in Italy, in France, in Ireland, in England — that does not possess at least one dominating female rôle? Think of the importance Shakespeare attaches to his women characters — to Lady Macbeth, to Viola, to Rosalind, to Desdemona, to Cordelia, to the two Portias! Did any playwright ever succeed in constructing a play, even a good acting play, without female characters? That can be done only by having no female character actually appear on the stage; but the influence of some woman, unseen yet potent, must be present if the play is to be a play at all. We have the word of Mr. Metcalfe, one of the leading dramatic critics of our own day, that it is a managerial canon that the women characters make or break a play.¹

Being true to life, to the whole of normal human

¹ *Life*, October 24, 1912.

life, the drama must of necessity concern itself with religion. Almost every season, in England or America, lists as one of its most popular dramatic offerings a play centuries old, a play with but an evanescent gleam of humor, a play far from ambitious in its appeal to the senses, a play devoid of any noted technical devices, a play with whole passages that might have been taken verbatim from the sermons of St. Chrysostom or Bossuet or Jeremy Taylor. It is the old fifteenth-century morality play, "Everyman." Its fundamental appeal, possibly its only appeal is its religious content. It is a great play, and great because of its religious note and its religious implications.

"Everyman" is not an isolated instance. The merest tyro in the history of the drama will be able to tell you that the Greek drama — the drama that produced Sophocles in tragedy and Aristophanes in comedy — had its origin in religious ceremonies; and that the drama of modern Europe — the drama that produced Shakespeare and Molière — was originally acted in the church building and by ecclesiastics, and that at least two canonized saints, St. Gregory of Nazianzus and the nun St. Hroswitha, were recognized as playwrights. He might too, if he be something more than a tyro, direct you to the wonderful golden age of the Spanish drama and show you that most of the Spanish dramatists — including even poor Lope de Vega — entered holy orders, and that Calderón, the greatest luminary among the dramatists of Spain,

was a devout and learned priest, who very often chose for the groundwork of his plays religious practices and religious truths.

These are some of the things that did not come into the reckoning of our supposititious visitor from Mars. He, alas, was too much like certain university trained investigators; he patiently, meticulously, studied the details of a relatively unimportant portion of the field, and on that study based his perfectly logical and perfectly misleading conclusions. We teachers must in this respect be wiser than the Martian. We shall best learn of the possibilities of correlation between religion and the drama when we learn to know and love the drama at its best, when we see in it in very sooth a mirror reflecting the ways of man with his fellows and his God.

CHAPTER XI

RELIGION AND PROSE FICTION

OF all forms of literature, the novel is the most literal and intimate in its portrayal of life. The essay, even in its most familiar and unconventional moods, is a commentary rather than a picture, is a talk about men and manners rather than a convincing reproduction of life itself; and it presupposes a modicum of cultural development in the reader, a measure of salutary sophistication. The drama has vividness and conveys convincingly an impression of reality, but it is rendered tentative and uncertain by its dependence on human actors, it is straitened and limited by the conventionalities and even the mechanics of stagecraft, and it is tyrannized over by the inexorable hands of the clock; the dramatist, normally, must either tell his story, be it long or short, simple or involved, in less than three hours, or he cannot tell it at all. The poem, by very reason of its being the breath and finer spirit of all literature, by very reason of its exaltation of mood and inherent sublimity, must exercise the principle of selection so rigorously as to leave untouched many aspects of life which, because of their very commonness, are indispensable to establish a sense of reality, aspects that might not in-

appositely be designated the roughage of the mind; when — witness Walt Whitman and Edgar Lee Masters and Miss Amy Lowell — poetry attempts to enshrine such phases of life, it ceases to be poetry and merges into dessicated prose.

From most of the limitations incident to the other literary forms, the art of prose fiction is free; and that fact explains its abiding popularity. Through the ages the mechanism of story telling has changed — the printed book supplanted the vocal rendition, even as in our own days the moving picture is supplanting the printed book — but the psychological principles controlling the art have not substantially varied and the story teller has lost nothing of his vogue. Before long we shall probably have the radio novel, illustrated with miniature motion pictures, ready at our elbow, and we shall be able to enjoy its appeal to ear and eye by pressing a button or adjusting a lever; yet it will be in substance the same sort of novel that a few years ago was printed in two bulky volumes and that a few centuries previous flowed for hours from the eloquent lips of some professional raconteur. For the story instinct is as deep as the dramatic instinct in human nature, and its existence and its possibilities were amply recognized by the Master Teacher of Whom it has been written, "Without parables He did not speak to them."

In its scope as broad as humanity and in its elastic technique capable of reproducing the vaguest thought of the human mind and the most evanescent emotion

of the human heart, prose fiction has educational and cultural possibilities difficult to realize, impossible to overestimate. For good or ill, for weal or woe, the novel is a most potent instrument. Novel reading can become—and too often does become—a mere indulgence of intellectual laziness, a species of mental soporific that saps energy and inhibits zestful action as surely as alcohol or opium; and novel reading can become—and in the case of the true student of literature it should become—an open sesame to the intellectual kingdom of knowledge and beauty and power, a means of broadening and deepening and refining the mind, of tempering the spirit, even of sanctifying the soul. It all depends on what novels we read and on how we read them.

Let it be said once and for all that the practice of reading works of fiction that are tawdry, superficial and ephemeral can merit neither excuse nor palliation. The mere waste of time which such reading involves is of itself enough to condemn the habit. And the necessity of securing our intellectual not less than our spiritual salvation, the necessity of habitually thinking noble thoughts not less than of habitually living noble lives, makes manifest the inconsequence, to say nothing of the dangers, of indiscriminate novel reading. This must be said; and it cannot be said too emphatically. But, on the other hand, too much cannot be said in favor of good novels and of the practice of reading them. To know intimately the best stories of the master novelists of all

races and of all times, to absorb their apparently casual but really calculated and profound commentaries on life, to live for an hour or two with their immortal because eminently human creations, to share vicariously in their dramas of human joys and sorrows and loves and hopes, to live by means of constructive imagination in the times and places they depict and to garner and to make our own some elements of their rich and sane and suggestive philosophy of life — this is to the student of literature neither more nor less than a duty at once pleasant and imperative. The truly great novel is as a magic casement through which we may look out upon the world and behold down all the centuries the goings and the comings of men, through which we may wrestle — and not always in vain — with some of the most vexing problems of human life and destiny, through which, if we but lift up our eyes and our hearts, we may catch reassuring glimpses of the calm, eternal stars.

The right reading of the right works of fiction affords endless possibilities of religious correlation. Because the novel touches life so intimately and at so many points, because it is so essentially concerned with human nature, human character, human motives, human conduct and human problems, it cannot avoid the moral and religious implications of life; and those religious implications the novel reader must perforce recognize and learn to evaluate. An eminent statesman once said that, in order to widen and rectify and

humanize his conception of any given period of history he was wont to read as many novels as he could get hold of that dealt with the life and customs of that period. Similarly it might be said that if we seek to widen and rectify and humanize our conceptions of Catholic life and of the moral aspects of existence, we shall do well to read and ponder those works of fiction which either directly or indirectly picture the careers of men and women actuated by Catholic ideals and either positively or negatively exemplifying the influence of moral forces.

Scores and scores of illustrations spring readily to mind. A modern instance is "*Maria Chapdelaine*," that beautiful idyl of Canadian life which by the sheer compelling potency of its truth and its artistry has won the applause of a generation of novel readers jaded by sensational and alleged realistic caricatures of humanity. The heart of that novel is a Catholic heart, the secret of its appealing beauty is its pervasive though unobtrusive Catholic atmosphere. It is no fairy tale, no improbable romance, no one-sided portrait, and so it has its shadows and its griefs and its moments of bitter tragedy as well as its stretches of sunlit road and its joys and its sweet and gracious comedy; but ever it leads to a perception of the illuminating truth that a childlike belief in God and a fertile and fervent love of God guides the trusting soul as a pillar of cloud through the darkest night and lends an added luster to the rosy dawn. "*Maria Chapdelaine*" is the prose "*Evangeline*" of New

World literature and far excels Longfellow's poem in depth, in discernment and in appreciation of Catholic ideals.

What Louis Hémon has done for a community, Monsignor Bickerstaffe-Drew, writing over his pen name of John Ayscough, has done for an individual. "San Celestino" is but a little volume and may be read easily in the course of one drowsy summer afternoon; yet it is truly a big book, big in its theme and its treatment, big in its artistic symmetry and reserve, big especially in its grasp of the essentials of sanctity and its appreciation of an unusual though very real vocation. Scholarship vast and vital, meditation long and fruitful, psychological intuition at once daring and convincing, have in "San Celestino" bridged the gap between the Middle Ages and our own day, have transformed a nebulous and much misunderstood historical figure into a living, admirable and inspiring man, have, in fine, converted "the great refusal" into the great acceptance. Despite the author's whimsical disavowal on the delightfully clerical plea that there is no lady in the case, "San Celestino" is a novel; it is also a book for spiritual reading, for all of us more approachable and for some of us more practical than the formidable volumes of Rodriguez and Pagani.

In some respects — perhaps in all essential respects — the finest novel in the world is "Don Quixote." And in its root idea it is susceptible of vital correlation with religious experience. The don and the squire are two eternal human types; the one, like

Shakespeare's lunatic, lover and poet, "of imagination all compact," the other a prosaic, plodding, matter-of-fact, earth-limed mortal who, like Corin in the Forest of Arden, knows that rain is wet and that fire burns. Don Quixote is an idealist, a radical, an enthusiast, a visionary; Sancho Panza is a materialist, a conservative, a plodder, an embodiment of what short-sighted men call common sense; and both win the pleasures and the pains which their respective temperaments woo. Now, we do not have to think very deeply before we discover that each of us approximates to one or other of these types, and that the extent of our approximation is made definite in our attitude to religious practices and ideals. Make monks of Don Quixote and Sancho and our meaning becomes apparent. What a fervent novice the lanky don would make! And how superbly the squire would fill the office of community procurator! . . . And from our meditation, and from the novel, we learn that in the worldly life and in the religious life, true wisdom is seated in the mean, that the ideal man is in part a Don Quixote and in part a Sancho Panza.

Some of the most remarkable instances of the recognition of God's claims on the world of His creation we find in novels in the ordinary sense not religious at all, in novels un-Catholic or even anti-Catholic. The explanation is simple. The real novelist is a literary artist, and the literary artist must perforce tell the truth about life. It is no accident, therefore, that the most glowing and impressive

tribute to the letter and the spirit of "The Imitation of Christ" occurs in the pages of George Eliot's "The Mill on the Floss," and that the same religious masterpiece, so spiritual and so Catholic, has been discussed reverently and enthusiastically by Honoré de Balzac. Such examples — and it were easy to multiply them from the master fiction of the world — serve to remind us that the novelist sometimes discerns and voices a truth which the philosopher evades or rejects. Some of the great philosophical writers, for instance, have dismissed the fact of original sin and denied the freedom of the human will; but every great novelist has, tacitly at least, admitted with Cervantes that every man is the son of his own works and that the theory of the fall of man explains human frailty and folly more amply than any other hypothesis can hope to do.

No dream has been dearer to the Western mind during the last hundred years than the dream of realized earthly perfection. Nietzsche raved about it in his fantastic theory of the Superman, Morris sought to envisage it in his "News from Nowhere" and Hudson in his "Crystal Age," Shelley in frail and glowing rapture and Whitman with his barbaric yawp chanted its revolutionary refrain. Among living writers of fiction no man has longed more keenly for this materialistic millennium than Mr. H. G. Wells; we recall how his unhistorical "Outline of History" has been framed in harmony with a utopian evolutionary theory. Mr. Wells as an historian may deceive himself; but Mr. Wells as a novelist must tell

the truth. His heroes, self-dedicated to the task of making heaven upon earth, for the most part, like the protagonist of "The New Machiavelli," either entangle themselves in the meshes of degrading sin and so nullify their efforts, or else, like poor Benham in "The Research Magnificent," grope vainly and pathetically for light. They render eloquent if unconscious testimony to the inadequacy of human strivings to renew the face of the earth. So, in one of his earlier books, "When the Sleeper Wakes," a man who had fallen into a cataleptic trance late in the nineteenth century enters into life more than two hundred years afterward and finds, side by side with phenomenal material progress, the same old blots of sin and suffering. Says Mr. Wells:

"He had hoped, as indeed his age had hoped, rashly taking it for granted, that the sacrifice of the many to the few would some day cease, that a day was near when every child born of woman should have a fair and assured chance of happiness. And here, after two hundred years, the same hope, still unfulfilled, cried passionately through the city. After two hundred years, he knew, greater than ever, were poverty and helpless labor and all the sorrows of his time."

And that same indictment of the theory of human perfectability through merely human means, that grotesque faith in the ability of man to lift himself by pulling at his own bootstraps, that philosophy of human life which would eliminate God as an essential and all-important factor, is found viewed now from

this angle, now from that, revealed now as comedy, now as tragedy, but always either explicitly or implicitly recognized, in the master novelists. It is the source of that faintly illuminated haze—a thing of strangely blended poignancy and beauty, which hangs over the vast field of Russian fiction and finds its most artistic rendering in the novels of Turgenev. When Goethe essays the novel form he teaches the same lesson of the futile quest that he has so spaciouly demonstrated in “Faust.” The ignoring of the religious conscience explains the bitterness of experience on the indulged palate of Flaubert’s most famous heroine; and the frank recognition of religious ideals lights with undying splendor the pages of Manzoni’s “I Promessi Sposi.” And among the English novelists the admittedly great names, the names that are most potent today and will be even more potent tomorrow, are the names of men who loved and revered the great truths of Christian faith.

CHAPTER XII

THE PERFECT SHORT STORY

As an illustration of the specimens of literary forms that the teacher may find ready at hand in the Holy Bible, let us select the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Let us examine it from the point of view of the story writer's exacting technique. Let us assume merely that we want to learn how to write short stories — or at least that we want to learn how to read them appreciatively — and that the parable has been called to our attention as a fine example of the theory of story writing carried into practice. We are not concerned, at least directly, with any consideration of the occasion when the parable was given to the people or with the sublime religious lessons which it teaches; we are concentrating on the parable as a specimen of the literary form known as the short story, and we are seeking to discover to what extent a critical reading of the parable will yield us some perception of the principles of the short story technique.

First of all, we note how the parable begins. "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the portion of substance that falleth to me."

Here we have a model introduction, — an introduc-

tion that really introduces. Before the parable has progressed a dozen words, we are already in the heart of its action. There is no lengthy account of the ancestors of the "certain man," no minute portraiture of his appearance and costume, no dythrambic ecstasy over the smell of the new mown fields or the purple pencillings on the distant mountains; there is not even that old friend and familiar, "Once upon a time." The first words strike the keynote of character; they are not "the eagle slowly lifted his imperial head," or "the pensive glory of an autumnal sunset was shedding its dimming glories on the everlasting hills," but simply and directly, "a certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said. . . ."

Let us next note that the younger son is the predominating character, the hero, the protagonist, the one person in the story whose career and whose mental operations we are going to follow from beginning to end. And therefore we make his acquaintance early — in the second sentence, to be exact — and we follow him step by step to the conclusion of the tale. Thus unity is simply and effectively preserved. We are told what the younger son said, and what he thought, and how he acted; but we are not told what the father thought and said or how the folks on the farm gossiped about it when they heard the news of the young man's departure. These things we may infer; but great art is eminently suggestive rather than literal, and leaves much, very much, to the imagination.

The action, so promptly and successfully started, is not delayed by clogging descriptions or by episodes that merely mark time. "And not many days after, the younger son, gathering all together, went abroad." The necessary passage of time is condensed into a phrase, and attention is retained in the young man and what he did. He "went abroad into a far country." Presumably his journey occupied days, even weeks; yet in the narration, because the journey is only a means to an end and in itself of no significance to the point of the parable, it is described in a mere half-dozen words.

The same suggestive and stimulating brevity characterizes the statement of the young man's career of dissipation: "And there [he] wasted his substance, living riotously." To the alert imagination every word is a picture. Note, for example, the force of the word *wasted*, how it carries a meaning different from *spent* or *scattered* or *invested*; and of the word *riotously*, which conjures up a kaleidoscopic picture of bright clothes and costly equipage, gay nights and frenzied pleasure-seeking, wine, women and song. We are led to see, in the mind's eye, the process of sowing the traditional wild oats; and already we sense the inevitable harvest. Were we to put down the book at this point and try to forecast what will happen next, we should certainly conjecture that a catastrophe is impending.

That catastrophe approaches in the very next words: "And after he had spent all, there came a

mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want." Troubles never come alone; it never rains but it pours. It would have been bad enough had the wastrel found himself in reduced circumstances even in normal times; but he reaches the end of his resources just as prosperity wanes in the land and everybody, including the wealthy, must take thought for daily bread.

"He began to be in want." The realization of his sad plight does not dawn on the prodigal at once; it is a slow but certain process. He awakens one fine morning to find his pockets empty. This he considers a misfortune, but not an insurmountable one. Has he not friends innumerable, friends who have proclaimed him the prince of good fellows, who have eaten his bread and drunk his wine and accepted his gifts of ermine and jewels, who have promised, in moments of muddle-headed effusiveness, never to desert him? Those friends, the prodigal tells himself, will feel honored and delighted to relieve his financial embarrassment. But when he finds that they receive him coldly, that they look the other way when they see him approaching, that they tell him quite bluntly that they have troubles of their own, then he truly *begins* to realize how helpless and needy he is. And for the first time in his sweet young life he faces the necessity of going to work.

So now, instead of seeking mere companionship or negotiating a gift or a loan, he proceeds to look for a job. Of course, he confidently tells himself, there

will be no difficulty about securing some comfortable remunerative position with which he can dally until circumstances assume a more friendly guise. But, alas, there are no such sinecures. Employers do not fight for the privilege of securing his estimable services; instead, they survey him with lack-luster eye and propound a most disconcerting question: "What can you do?" And our hero becomes suddenly conscious of his lily-white hands and his untrained mind and stumbles out again into the stony ways of the city. He is very cold and very shabby and very hungry now; and his step has lost the resiliency of yore. He is in desperate straits.

"And he went and cleaved to one of the citizens of that country." It is a case of any port in a storm. To this presumably fat and prosperous landowner the prodigal literally *cleaves*, for the prodigal has become now like a burr or a microbe — a parasite that clings to any living thing, that will not be shaken off, for to be shaken off means utter ruin.

Now, as we approach near the climax of the parable, the tempo becomes slower. The swift, brisk narrative lessens its speed that the reader may appreciate more fully the circumstances in which the protagonist finds himself and the sad thoughts that occupy his throbbing head. "And he sent him into his farm to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him." Every detail is charged with meaning. His office is not to sweep the room or

wash the dishes, to prune the vines or water the horses, but to feed the swine. And this erstwhile *bon vivant* is so hungry and so needy that he eagerly would gorge himself with the muddied and mildewed husks which the very pigs gruntingly toss aside with their foul snouts.

And now comes the climax, the turning point of the story. Sitting among the pigs, shivering with cold and hungry to the point of exhaustion and indescribably sick at heart, the young man contrasts his dismal lot with the comfortable environment of the servants in his father's house; and he thinks of his father, and the old familiar scenes, and homesickness grips him, and shame and salutary grief; and he says: "I will arise, and will go to my father." "I will arise" is no redundancy; the expression calls attention to the searching psychological fact that the great achievement is not for the prodigal to go to his father — for he has really nobody else to go to — but *to arise*; it is the initial effort that demands heroic courage. Here is the climax of the story, because it presents the nub of the action, the to-be-or-not-to-be of the prodigal's career. He can arise and live; he can remain prone among the swine and die. Which will he do?

"And rising up he came to his father." We are told nothing of the events of the homeward journey, of the bleak days and the starless nights, of the rain and the cold and the enshrouding darkness, of the perils from wild beasts, of the jeers of the passers-by.

And why? Because, for the prodigal, these things simply do not exist. He is under the influence of a dominating impulse, a fixed idea; he finds his way instinctively, like a somnambulist; his unseeing eyes are staring ever far ahead. For all his dirt and his rags, his unkempt beard and his blistered feet, there is a music in his heart that courses through his veins like wine—the music made by the human spirit when its chords vibrate to the touch of the thought of father and of home.

To the very end of the story the prodigal continues to hold the center of the stage; but the technical perfection of the parable is now furthered by the introduction of an inimitable character contrast established between the father and the elder brother.

“And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.” How delicately is conveyed the pathetic tidings that every day the poor man stood looking for his erring son’s return. Nor is the father intent upon maintaining his dignity, upon showing a certain amount of righteous reserve. He “was moved with compassion, and running to him fell upon his neck, and kissed him.” And he cuts short the prodigal’s confession of guilt; he calls at once, quickly, for the first robe and the ring and the shoes, and the killing of the fatted calf. “And,” the glad old man continues, “let us eat and make merry.”

Such is the father; now for the elder brother. Drawing near the house, he hears music and dancing. That in itself is sufficient to put him into bad humor,

for he is a most delectable puritanical killjoy, is this elder brother, and his philosophy of life assumes that whatever is merry hath some relish of damnation in it. He is also a good deal of a sneak. Instead of going into the house like a man and finding out what the matter is, he characteristically prefers to get his information from one of the servants. (His tribe, be it said in passing, is not wholly extinct!) And when he heard the news, "he was angry, and would not go in." That is to say, he stood just outside the door, where the merrymakers could see him, and sulked; he must needs be the fly in the ointment, the rift in the lute; his self-appointed vocation was to take the joy out of life.

There is the contrast—the father within doors footing a measure while tears of joy stream down his glowing face; and the elder brother, so conscious of his own goodness that it hurts, frowning in the doorway and shedding gloom like a dripping umbrella. This contrast the parable pursues to the very close.

"His father therefore coming out began to entreat him." Since the music and the dancing have for the moment ceased, the elder brother is thawed sufficiently to vouchsafe an explanation of his boorish conduct; and it is the smug hypocritical, plupious explanation of the "unco' guid." He characterizes his erring brother's conduct as harshly as he can; he does not say, "wasted his substance, living riotously," but "devoured his substance with harlots." Like so many of his ilk he has an essentially foul mind.

What a wonderfully impressive picture meets the falling curtain. In the doorway stand two figures — the father saying: “This thy brother was dead and is come to life again,” and the elder son sulking and frowning because he is not filial enough or brotherly enough to understand; and within, amidst the warmth and good cheer, sits the wanderer, a great love and great gladness filling his battered heart.

CHAPTER XIII

RELIGION AND THE ESSAY

THE essay is of all literary forms the easiest to teach and the hardest to talk about teaching. And religion is of all subjects the most fascinating and the most generally misunderstood. A perception of these facts should in itself open to the alert teacher many salutary possibilities of making the literary study of the essay contribute religious ideas to the student's intellect, religious coloring to the student's emotional life and religious motives to the development of the student's will.

Not every piece of writing called an essay is a fit subject of literary study, because not every piece of writing called an essay could properly be considered literature at all. We are concerned here with the essay that is literature, the essay, that is, be its subject, its style and its outlook what they may, which looks upon human life through some sort of human temperament and records the vision in terms of beauty. Now, in such essays, written in the English language, the teacher intent on correlation with religion will be concerned with two things: (A) the factor which in some way or another constitutes a presentation of the religious background, of the Catholic philosophy of

life; and (B) the factor which, in whatever degree or by whatever means, constitutes a statement of the Protestant Tradition or of paganism old or new.

Some essays, such as Father Faber's "On Kindness," are entirely embodiments of the Catholic philosophy of life. Some essays, such as Matthew Arnold's series on "Literature and Dogma," are in all essential respects non-Catholic or anti-Catholic in their viewpoint. But most essays, irrespective of whether they were written by Catholics, Protestants, old pagans or new pagans, contain elements falling into both classifications — factors A and B. Ruskin, for example, in his splendid address on "The Mystery of Life and Its Arts," delivered at the Royal College of Science, Dublin, in 1868, voices not only the Catholic philosophy of life, but likewise something of the uncertainty and sadness of the old paganism, something of the unrest and futility of the new paganism and something of that irritation and that inconsistency which are legitimate children of the Protestant Tradition. And Thoreau, in his "Walden," is in accord with the Catholic philosophy of life when he eloquently points out that spiritual and not material riches should be the goal of man's endeavor, and in accord with the pagan philosophy of life when he explains spiritual riches to be substantially and exclusively peace of mind and the contemplation of nature. Of this latter aspect of Thoreau's teaching, Brother Azarias has well said: "Thoreau is only a human mole. He lives in the earth, and his thoughts

are of the earth, earthy. He ignores the clear sky of a spiritual world [as the word spiritual is understood by Catholics] and the brilliant sunshine of a divine revelation."¹

It might be objected that our classification of essays into A and B is too rigid, that there are many essays, indubitably literature, devoid of any religious element, whether positive or negative. In a sense, that is true; but it is not less true, and far more practical to remember, that every essay that in any serious and vital way is literature at all is susceptible of correlation with religion. An admirable case in point is Lamb's "Dream Children." In its outlook and tenor it is not perceptibly Catholic, Protestant or pagan; yet to the Catholic reader it prompts a chain of reflections that lead to one of the most exalted of the Christian virtues. The mellow bachelor in Lamb's sweetly pathetic essay sits musing on the children that might have been his, and a beautiful and eminently human sadness shrouds him as he faces the realization that the blessing of fatherhood is denied him. The Catholic religious — the Benedictine priest, say, or the Brother of Mary — up to a certain point could make the same reflection and might at first be supposed to share the same noble melancholy; but the Catholic religious, who has voluntarily taken upon himself the obligation of chastity, is immeasurably consoled by the thought that, even though he is a celibate, he is not bereft of children; for he *has*

¹ "Phases of Thought and Criticism," page 11.

children, spiritual children, penitents whom he has directed, converts whom he has been instrumental in bringing into the Church, pupils upon whom he has traced his own spiritual and intellectual lineaments. The priest is vowed to eternal celibacy; but, with that almost startling psychological veracity which characterizes Catholic terminology, the priest is familiarly addressed as "Father." The practice of celibacy, which, superficially considered, seems to cut a man off from the duty and the happiness of fatherhood, in reality becomes the means of crowning him with paternity of the most consoling and exalted character. This illustration of the treatment of what might be considered a religiously neutral essay will suffice to show that in every piece of genuine literature — every piece of writing, that is, which probes to the heart of life — there are possibilities of fruitful and practical correlation with religion.

In the essay or the portion of any essay which falls under A of our classification, the religious factor may assume various forms. It may lie in the mood of the writer, rather than in his matter. Such is the case with most of Miss Agnes Repplier's essays; we do not find Miss Repplier explaining Catholic doctrines, directly inculcating Catholic morals or recounting the lives of the saints, and yet we are ever conscious in reading her well knit prose of a Catholic background and a Catholic outlook on life. Again, the religious element may be moral or doctrinal or historical or even — for in rare instances controversy rises to

literature — controversial; in Cardinal Newman's masterpiece it is autobiographical. In whatever forms the religious factor manifests itself, the wise teacher will let the manifestation take place; that is, he will not make the fatal mistake of turning the lesson in literature into a lesson in Christian Doctrine or Catholic Apologetics. He will let the author speak for himself, and he will let the student discover and absorb the Catholic element in the essay studied.

First impressions of the religious content or mood of the essay should be clarified and enforced by comparisons with other statements of the same truth or of similar views of life. The religious element in Thoreau's "Walden," for instance, is in some respects in striking accord with the Catholic element in Ruskin's essay mentioned in an earlier paragraph; both bear a kinship to the opening chapter of Father Faber's "Creator and Creature," and to Dante's poetical disquisition on temporal and eternal riches in the fifteenth canto of the "Purgatorio." All four have their superexcellent and abiding source in Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Ruskin's "Stones of Venice," wherein the English essayist dwells on the artistic triumphs of the Catholic faith, affords many points of comparison with Chateaubriand's "Le genie du Christianisme," and serves to exemplify some of the generalities set forth by Francis Thompson in his essay on Shelley. And some of Mr. Gilbert K. Chesterton's most glowing pages almost cry aloud for comparison with corresponding chapters in Balmes'

"El Protestantismo comparado con el Catolicismo," Bossuet's "Historie Universelle," and St. Augustine's "De Civitate Dei." These are random instances of how the study of comparative literature may be pursued in the Catholic school.

But the study of the essay must not be confined to books alone; it must be carried into the lives and the times and the environment of the pupils. The vital application of literature to the personal problems and needs of the students is really the most important phase of the study, for it makes for character training, for self-discipline, for breadth and sanity of viewpoint. Hence, the teacher will encourage class discussions, short talks, informal compositions and debates on topics of present-day vital interest suggested by the religious element in the essays being read. Thus, Father Faber's "On Kindness" is susceptible of direct application to some of the obligations of our Boy Scouts, Stevenson's defence of Father Damien reawakens us to the need of sympathy and fraternal charity and suggests consideration of the Catholic Students' Mission Crusade. Macaulay's famous tribute to the Catholic Church urges a consideration of conditions today existing throughout the Catholic world, Newman's several university essays demand discussion of current educational needs and conditions—for instance, the relative advantage of the state university and the Catholic college. The field of application to the lives and environment of the pupils is practically limitless; and limitless, too, is the ex-

tent of potential profit from such a pedagogical device.

And now for the essays or portions of essays that fall under the B of our classification. The first thing for the teacher to do is to read, or re-read, Cardinal Newman's sprightly and illuminating book, "The Present Position of Catholics in England." That work explains lucidly and adequately just what is meant by the Protestant Tradition; and having mastered it, the teacher is in a position to approach the anti-Catholic essay with comprehension and discernment. Even in high school classes there will be found pupils who can read "The Present Position," too; and even the most mediocre high school pupils can read Dr. Peter C. Yorke's virile and absorbing book, "The Ghosts of Bigotry." After such reading the students will be enabled to explain the anti-Catholic animus to be found in certain pages of practically all the great non-Catholic English essayists, the animus to be found, too, here and there, in American essayists like Emerson and Thoreau and Lowell, and even in Washington Irving's incomparable "Sketch Book."

A profitable class exercise, in connection with essays and passages embodying in matter or in mood some form of the Protestant Tradition, would be this: Have the class make a list of statements, arguments, inferences and the like that are manifestly anti-Catholic; then let the pupils classify the materials under the three following heads: 1. Ignorance; 2. Prejudice; 3. Faulty reasoning. All manifestations of the Protestant Tradition are directly traceable to

one or other of those three sources of error. And let the pupils observe that prejudice may be very real and quite unconscious at the same time; that Irving, for example, though a kindly, broad-minded gentleman, was betrayed into bad taste by unconscious prejudice when he spoke lightly of the relics of the True Cross and when he described some saints as being "literally smoked out of countenance" by the votive tapers burning at their shrines.

The pagan element in literature is either very old or very new. It is old when it derives from the paganism of the ancient world; it is new when it results from the neo-paganism in which sixty per cent of the American people dwell at this very day. It may be illustrated readily enough by analyzing the average essay in the average secular magazine, wherein is much talk of humanity and brotherhood and the dignity of labor, but not a word about the vital religion which alone makes humanity bearable, brotherhood real and labor sacred. In the modern theater, the modern book and the modern magazine, this neo-paganism is extremely fashionable; let the Catholic teacher bring his pupils to see that what is fashionable is not necessarily wise or true or good.

The general aim of the Catholic teacher of literature, when guiding a class through the rich and varied world of the essay, is to construct and maintain a religious background of thought and action, a Catholic theory of willing and living. Our pupils, for the most part, are to be the fathers and mothers of the

next generation. We must see to it that they learn to know and love the master English essayists, true friends and mentors and comforters and guides; and we must see to it likewise that they learn to read the great essayists in the light of religious beauty and of Catholic truth.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW TO TEACH "THE IMITATION"

THE trend of literary study within the last decade or two has been in the direction of what might be called the life books of the race. DeQuincey's famous distinction between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power has been widely recognized, and the leaning is unmistakably toward the literature of power. The days of scrappy extracts and "choice selections" and garbled versions and manuals giving everything about an author except his books are now happily in the past. Modern English teachers demand more books, and fewer books about books.

This tendency makes the introduction of a' Kempis's "Imitation of Christ" into the high school a sane and consistent proceeding. The book is one of the great books of the world. It is a human document. It is the voice of the race. Its tones ring true to universal human experience, its message is fraught with the intangible but unmistakable quality of permanence. In short, "The Imitation" finds its logical place in the high school because it is a piece of literature.

And if this be true of the secular high school, it is immeasurably more true of our Catholic high schools

and academies. For "The Imitation" is a book deeply and vitally Catholic. It is not only literature, but Catholic literature. It ranks among the most precious of the heritages bequeathed us from the ages of faith.¹

In general, there are two methods by which "The Imitation of Christ" might be taught with profit in high school and academic grades: The teaching may proceed from the times to the text, or from the text to the times. The former method would be particularly efficacious were the study of "The Imitation" made supplementary to historical study of the Middle Ages and of the period just before the Reformation. But in most cases the second method of study — from the text to the times — will prove of more utility. A tentative plan by which this method of studying the book may be realized in the average high school class is here offered.

The initial aim of the instructor must be to arouse the interest of the pupils. It is safe to presuppose that they know practically nothing of the book or of its author. Hence the primary problem facing the teacher is to bring the pupils into pleasant relations with the work before the reading of it is actually begun. This initial interest may be secured in several ways:

¹ The use of "The Imitation" in our schools has been facilitated by the inclusion of an English version of the work in the Macmillan Company's Pocket Classics. The text has been edited, with introduction and notes, by Brother Leo.

1. **Informal talks concerning the influence of "The Imitation."** Many of the great minds of the last five centuries have held the book in high regard. King Louis XVI, in the days of his affliction, found lasting comfort in its pages. Comte made it a part of his Positivist ritual. St. John Baptist de la Salle, the founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, made a daily reading in "The Imitation" a point of rule for the members of his congregation. The simplicity and directness of its style pierced the sophistication of La Harpe and truth flooded his soul with the light of an apparition. General Gordon had a copy of "The Imitation" in his pocket on the day he fell before the Mahdi's spears at Khartoum. It was the consolation of John Boyle O'Reilly in his prison cell. Matthew Arnold calls it "the most exquisite document after those of the New Testament, of all the documents the Christian spirit has ever inspired." It deeply impressed Ruskin; and George Eliot, in her "Mill on the Floss," has paid the little volume of Thomas a' Kempis an eloquent and impassioned tribute. Balzac turned to it for light and refreshment; and of its author Anatole France has written: "He knew life profoundly. He had penetrated to the secrets of the soul and of the senses. . . . His sentences are psychological jewels before which adepts remain astounded."¹ Hundreds of men and women in various walks of life found in "The

¹ "La Vie Littéraire": in review of Bourget's "Mén-songes."

Imitation of Christ" a fountain of solace and of inspiration.

2. **The reading of favorite passages from the text.** It goes without saying that the instructor must himself be familiar with "The Imitation." He can share his enthusiasm with the class by quoting from the text passages that have especially appealed to him by reason of their beauty, their truth, their wisdom, their mysticism or their practicality. He can comment briefly on them and induce the pupils to do the same. This is one of the most effective means of securing the interest of the class.

3. **An attractive biographical sketch of the author.** Were we teaching "The Lady of the Lake" we should arouse the interest of the pupils in the personality of Scott; were we teaching Milton's minor poems we could not well neglect Milton. For a much greater reason,* the class should be introduced to Thomas a' Kempis before they settle down to a serious study of his masterpiece. A rightly directed class talk on a' Kempis will achieve this purpose. The instructor must strive to limn a life-like picture of the monk of Mount St. Agnes and to fill in, with vivid bits of coloring, the background of the times in which he lived. The treatment should be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

4. **Emphasis on the literary quality of "The Imitation."** The book is to be studied, not directly as a treatise on the spiritual life but primarily as a literary masterpiece. That the pupils will secure from

the study a fund of spiritual nourishment is an assured fact; but the teacher must bear in mind that the moral value of his lessons will be all the more significant if he himself do but hold his peace and allow Thomas a' Kempis to touch youthful hearts and inspire youthful zeal. In other words the instructor, especially if he be a religious, must remember that he is a teacher of literature and not a missionary preaching on Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell. He will emphasize the fact that "The Imitation" is one of the great books of the world because it is an expression of life, a commentary on life and a contribution toward a philosophy of life. And he will show that all supreme literary achievements, like "Hamlet" and the "Divina Commedia" and the Homeric poems, possess those three qualities.

Initial interest in the book and its author being secured, the next step in the teaching of "The Imitation of Christ" is what may be technically called the rapid reading of the text. The word rapid connotes concentration rather than speed. The rapid reading consists in familiarizing the class with the letter of the classic and in giving brief explanations of passages difficult to understand. During this stage of the teaching, the attention of the pupils should be centered on the text of "The Imitation" and should not be permitted to wander to any notable extent along the by-paths of thought however suggestive and inviting.

A considerable portion of the rapid reading should

be done in class, sometimes by the students and sometimes by the teacher. But the best results will not accrue unless the pupils be persuaded to read at least some portions of the book out of class time. That such outside reading has been performed and performed rightly the teacher may learn by questions and class discussions. The pupils must be taught to use for themselves the critical and explanatory notes at the end of the Macmillan edition.

The teaching next branches out from the text to the times. The letter of "The Imitation" is now well in hand; the next step is to lead the students to grasp something of its spirit. A second and more detailed study of the life of Thomas a' Kempis will bring out some of the characteristics of the time in which the book was written. According to the maturity of the pupils, assignments may be made for special study and research work along lines suggested by the rapid reading of the text and by the class discussions. This opens up an attractive and fruitful field of historical reading which the students may avail themselves of at the discretion of the instructor. The supreme consideration to be borne in mind is that the text of "The Imitation" must be made and kept the central point of interest to which all the special study and research work is but contributory.

One profitable field of research in connection with the book will be that dealing with the sources and influences of "The Imitation." A' Kempis derived most of his inspiration from the Bible. He likewise

availed himself of the opportunities afforded by the reading of Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Cicero, Virgil and other ancient classical writers. St. Bernard, St. Thomas, St. Gregory the Great and other of the Christian Fathers likewise influenced the monk of Mount St. Agnes. And he was especially indebted to the writers of the Brothers of the Common Life, generally known as the School of Windesheim.

Returning to the text, the class may now be induced to analyze the general plan of the work, determine its scope and make a special study of its most notable chapters. Chapters especially susceptible of such treatment are: "Of the Doctrine of Truth," Book I, iii; "Of the Examples of the Holy Fathers," Book I, xviii; "Of the Love of Solitude and Silence," Book I, xx; "Of Familiar Friendship with Jesus," Book II, viii; "Of the Royal Road of the Holy Cross," Book II, xii; "Of the Wonderful Effects of Divine Love," Book IV, v; "Of the Different Motions of Nature and Grace," Book IV, liv; "That All Our Hope and Confidence Are to Be Fixed in God Alone," Book IV, lix.

Another effective device in the special study of "The Imitation" is the collecting and grouping of passages bearing on given subjects. Let the student go over the entire work with a view to finding and noting passages bearing on such topics as business, study, silence, humility, zeal, etc. This plan will have the twofold advantage of impressing upon the students many of the leading ideas set forth by

a' Kempis and of making them, through repeated and systematic readings, more and more familiar with the text.

A particular phase of the work just indicated should be the selection and tabulation of chapters and passages bearing upon the actual life of the students, on their intellectual employments and their religious duties. Thus, for instance, they can be led to perceive that the reading of portions of the Third Book¹ will form a special aid in preparing themselves for the reception of Holy Communion. They may also select chapters suited to various moods, fortunes and conditions.

The better to realize the nature, scope and limitations of "The Imitation of Christ" as a literary masterpiece, the class may now establish comparisons between the treatise of a' Kempis and works of literature with which they are already familiar. The correlation of "The Imitation" with such masterpieces as the plays of Shakespeare, the "Æneid," and the poems of Tennyson is quite within the ability of the average high school class, especially if the teacher knows how to conduct class discussions in a stimulating and fruitful way. Let us suppose, for example, that the class has already studied "Macbeth." "The

¹ That is, the book concerning the Holy Communion. Many editions of "The Imitation" make this part of the treatise the Fourth Book, a proceeding for which the only warrant is custom. The correct order of the books, as given in the a' Kempis manuscript of 1441, has been observed in the Macmillan edition.

Imitation" may be reviewed as a commentary on the play, and passages and chapters may be selected for re-reading that bear especially upon the characters and the ethical significance of the drama. The educational value of this work of correlation can scarcely be overestimated.

Another branch of correlation naturally suggests itself. The class discussions might at times assume the nature of formal talks by the pupils on certain phases of thought suggested by the study of "The Imitation," thus correlating the work with oral composition. And, of course, the results of the students' research can be embodied in essays more or less ambitious in scope and design. Some teachers of English find it practicable to have most of the theme-writing of the students done in connection with the literature being studied at the time, and to such teachers "The Imitation of Christ" will offer unusual possibilities.

Among books especially useful to both teacher and students in connection with a study of "The Imitation" are Dom Vincent Scully's "Life of the Venerable Thomas a' Kempis" and Brother Azarias's "Phases of Thought and Criticism." The former is the most accessible biography of a' Kempis that we possess in English and is a book written with discrimination, sympathy and insight. The latter contains a celebrated chapter on "The Spiritual Sense of 'The Imitation'" which is at once a masterpiece of style and thought.

In the last analysis, all teaching depends on the teacher, and this applies with special force to the teaching of "The Imitation." Methods, even good methods, have their limitations; at best, they are but the dry bones in the prophet's dream which must be clothed with the flesh of the teacher's knowledge and vivified by the teacher's enthusiasm. Let the instructor know the book and love it, and his work will be a success.

CHAPTER XV

CATHOLIC LITERATURE EXCLUSIVELY?

ALL of us, I think, will agree that certain Catholic literary masterpieces should be taught in our schools, that our courses of study — whether in the grades, in high school or in college — should have a decidedly Catholic coloring, that our graduates should hold as a most precious part of their cultural heritage a knowledge of the great Catholic writers and some realization of the prominent part taken by the Catholic Church and her representatives in contributing to world literature. This is, indeed, not the least reason for the very existence of our Catholic schools, and those schools are false to their mission if they fail to secure that result.

But it is one thing to teach Catholic classics, and quite another thing to teach nothing but Catholic classics; and the question which I now assume to be at issue is this: Should we teach Catholic literature *exclusively*? It seems to me that the question should be answered in the negative, that while we most properly teach, let us say, Cardinal Wiseman's "Fabiola," and Thomas a' Kempis's "Imitation of Christ," we should not neglect to teach Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities" and Burke's "On Conciliation

With America." "Now these things you ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

To include none but the works of Catholic authors in our courses of study would be to make those courses of study needlessly attenuated. Even from the distinctively Catholic point of view we should miss much. For it must never be forgotten that in many cases the Catholic spirit and the Catholic tradition have found expression in the writings of non-Catholic authors. Tennyson was not a Catholic, and yet he incorporated Catholic legendary material in his "Idylls of the King." Longfellow was not a Catholic, and yet he drew a beautiful picture of Catholic life in "Evangeline." Ruskin was not a Catholic, and yet in many of his essays he offers splendid interpretations of Catholic masterpieces of poetry, painting and sculpture. Fairly numerous instances might be added of non-Catholic writers who found their inspiration in Catholic themes and who embodied their conceptions in a fashion both acceptable and helpful to the Catholic student.

Nor must we forget, in this connection, that the appeal of the Catholic content in such writers is all the stronger to our pupils. It is not inherently impossible that a Catholic writer might have been attracted to the theme of the expulsion of the Acadians and have written a poem even more closely in harmony with the Catholic spirit than is Longfellow's charming idyl. And yet, whether we like the fact or not, there is a strong probability that

neither we nor our pupils would react as strongly to an "Evangeline" written by a Catholic as we do to the Longfellow poem. We take it for granted that a devout and learned Catholic would elect a Catholic theme, that he would paint Catholic life and Catholic atmosphere in the most favorable colors, that more or less consciously he would make his writing an expression of missionary zeal. And — perhaps without being aware that we were so doing — we would discount his work because he is of the household of faith. (We should not, perhaps, but that is not the point.) We might even go farther. Knowing as we must that often devotional poems written by Catholics are literary in inverse ratio to their pietism, we might even be tempted to suspect the worth of the poem from the literary point of view. But when a non-Catholic New Englander deliberately chooses a Catholic theme, when a man who elsewhere is not free from prejudice against Catholic institutions and unfairness toward Catholic episodes in history evolves a work that represents Catholic life as essentially beautiful and Catholic ideals as essentially sublime, when, so to speak, he tells the truth in spite of himself, then that same truth naturally means more to us.

But in our choice of non-Catholic writers it is not wise to confine ourselves to those who treat Catholic themes in a more or less Catholic spirit. There are many books, written by non-Catholics — even by anti-Catholics — in which inheres no perceptible Catholic element, which, nevertheless, our pupils should read

and discuss and understand. The knowledge to be derived from such books may not directly contribute to the development of the Catholic spirit in the children's attitude toward life, and yet they should be open books to our classes. Why?

For one thing, for the sake of consistency. If we run over the subjects taught in the average Catholic high school we shall find many, perhaps a majority of subjects that do not directly and immediately affect the Catholic life of the pupils. Geometry, zoölogy, bookkeeping and French grammar do not intrinsically tend to make our children stronger or better Catholics. Then why do we teach them? Because, of course, we find in them possibilities of correlation with religion; but likewise because they aid us in attaining one of the purposes of our educational system. Our schools exist, first of all, in order that our children may learn how to become and to be devout and practical Catholics; but they also exist in order that our children may learn how to become and to be useful and representative and public-spirited citizens.

The country we live in is not a distinctively Catholic country and even the most devout Catholic — unless he happens to be favored with a vocation to a contemplative order — has to spend a goodly portion of his workaday life in occupations that in themselves have little or nothing to do with his religion. (We know how he can sanctify his every moment and every action by directing his intention to the honor and service of God, but that, again, is not the point.)

Now, we want our children to be able ultimately to take their place in the world, in professional and business life, to be able to coöperate with their fellow citizens in work tending to the betterment of social conditions and appealing to civic pride and national patriotism. That is why we teach geometry and zoölogy, bookkeeping and French grammar; and that is why we ought to teach non-Catholic literature.

For if our children, the products of our Catholic system of training, are to be successful in their professional and commercial struggles in after life, if they are to be efficient members of a community recruited from a number of widely disparate social planes, it is needful that they have become sharers in the intellectual background of the world in which they live. With many elements of that mental environment they cannot, of course, as consistent Catholics, permit themselves to be in sympathy; but, even if their work is to be only social amelioration or the exercise of apostolic zeal, they cannot labor fruitfully unless they at least understand their fellow men. They cannot take their place in the world unless they understand the world, and they cannot understand the world unless they know something of the best that has been written and thought in the world.

I cheerfully grant that there is not much of a Catholic content in Thackeray's "History of Henry Esmond," though I insist that a strong Catholic teacher can make it a fine character-forming book; but everybody must grant that in the "History of

Henry Esmond" there is a profound and searching human content, an impressive knowledge of certain phases of human life whose manifestations are not confined either to Thackeray's time or to the time of the Young Pretender. Some of its pages are not altogether edifying; but some phases of modern life in the midst of which our pupils will presently find themselves immersed are not altogether edifying either, and the right study of Thackeray will prove a preparation and an antidote for impending perils to faith and to morality.

"I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil," was the prayer of Our Lord for His chosen ones on the night of the Last Supper; and in that same prayer we Catholic teachers may well find a principle to guide us in our selection of literature texts and in our teaching thereof. Our children are destined to live out their lives in the midst of the world, to be exposed to the corroding environment of modern paganism, to be subjected to intellectual and emotional forces that are indifferent to God, that in some cases are even hostile to God. Many of those forces will come to them disguised as angels of light, robed in a specious appearance of goodness and loftiness and grace. How, humanly speaking, will it be possible for our pupils to learn to distinguish the right from the wrong, the good from the bad, the true from the false?

Obviously, I think, by learning to draw the distinc-

tion during their days of preparation for life. The school is the training camp for complete living. In that training camp the young soldiers of Christ are to practice the drill and daily routine of the Christian army, to dig entrenchments against vice, to grow skilful in the use of the weapons of spiritual warfare; but they must also fight sham battles the better to recognize the wiles of their enemies and put their foes to flight. Among those adversaries are false notions of virtue, the tyranny of ungodly customs and pernicious maxims regarding faith and morality. Now very many of such notions, customs and maxims are embedded in literature, since literature is a portrait of life itself; and a phase of the character training imparted in the Catholic school should be systematic practice in combating evil to be met with in books as a preliminary for combating the evil eventually to be met with in normal adult life.

To be specific: In most of the masterpieces of English fiction—in the representative novels of Scott, Thackeray and George Eliot—there is the taint of anti-Catholic prejudice. Is it not the part of wisdom to have our pupils understand once for all that the same prejudice runs like a yellow thread through the woof of all non-Catholic English literature from the Reformation period down even to our own day? We can show them that it is there; and, following the splendid example of Cardinal Newman, we can show them why it is there. And then we can go a step further and show them that the prejudice

that exists in the literature which they read will be found as well in the world in which they are to live, and that in life as in books it is the offspring of ignorance and misunderstanding. And this realization will bring home to them the necessity of knowing their faith and living up to its dictates since knowledge will overcome ignorance and good example will enlighten misunderstanding.

It is rigidly true that the Catholic school is the last place on earth where little ones of the flock should be scandalized, and that there is a special application to the Catholic teacher of the impressive words of Christ: "Woe to that man by whom scandal cometh." But not all information is scandalous information. The commander-in-chief of an army does not scandalize his soldiers when he explains to them the enemy's plan of attack and shows them the proper method of adjusting the gas-mask and manipulating the bayonet. If he were to be reproved by a pacifist for such practices, if the pacifist were to say in substance: "You are a thoroughly wicked man, because you are teaching these soldiers of yours to think evil of the enemy and even to kill them," the commander-in-chief—after inhibiting the perfectly pardonable impulse to throw the objector out of the window—would probably reply: "I know I am teaching my soldiers to be suspicious of the enemy, but you must remember that the enemy is a decidedly suspicious character; I know I am teaching them to kill the enemy, but that is what soldiers are

for. Do you think warfare consists merely in wearing a uniform and marching on parade? ”

And so, similarly, if it should be objected to the Catholic teacher, “ You are calling the attention of your pupils to some of the evil that is in books and in life, you are arousing in their young minds an hostility to dangerous tendencies and maxims,” the teacher might justifiably reply: “ Of course I am, and that is just what I am here for. These young people under my care are to be soldiers of Christ and His Church, and I want them to be not only well-groomed soldiers and well-nourished soldiers, but likewise alert and efficient soldiers. They must be zealous and devout; but their zeal must be according to knowledge and their devotion capable of sustaining itself and them in the hostile environment of the modern world. To forewarn them is to forearm them. This is not by any means the whole of my work as a Christian teacher, but it is incontestably an indispensable part of it.”

An important consideration in the teaching of literature, as in the teaching of everything else, is point of view; and I think we are overlooking a part of our obligations as Catholic teachers if we do not teach secular literary masterpieces from a Catholic point of view. This process cannot scandalize anybody, with the possible exception of the timorous critic who really wants to be scandalized. As growing bodies need to be exercised by overcoming physical resistance, so growing minds and souls need to be

exercised by combating error and the maxims of false morality. That is not leading our pupils into temptation; it is, in the older sense of the word, *preventing* or *going before* or *preparing them for* temptation. "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world."

Again, the traditional procedure of Catholic educators has been against the use of Catholic texts exclusively. It is a commonplace of literary history that the monasteries and monastic schools preserved many pieces of ancient pagan literature that but for them would have perished utterly; and it is not less true that the scribes of the mediaeval monastic scriptorium copied secular as well as sacred books. The representative doctors of the Church spent much of their time doing what we Catholic teachers should do, namely, teaching pagan literature from the Catholic point of view; St. Augustine, be it remembered, enthusiastically advocated the practice and maintained that even as the Christians had taken the stones of pagan temples to construct their churches, so might they fittingly employ pagan literature as an aid in the propagation of God's holy truth. Such thoroughly Catholic books as the Epistles of St. Paul and "The Imitation of Christ" are replete with references and allusions to pagan poets and sages; and most of the great teaching orders of the Church, notably the Society of Jesus, in stressing Latin and Greek in the scheme of education, have recognized the propriety and desirability of teaching secular literature. When,

as is a matter of fact, the odes of Horace are read in a Catholic seminary, I cannot see the criminality of the novels of Thackeray being read in a Catholic high school.

But, it may be objected, the teaching of the ancient classics is one thing; the teaching of modern secular literature is quite another. In a sense that is true; but in so far as the Greek classics differ from the English classics at all, the difference, from the angle of our present consideration, is that the English classics are patently less pagan and more Christian. As to thoroughly bad books — books foul and salacious and depraved and corrupt — there are none such among the classics, ancient or modern; for Old Father Time, the most searching and decisive of critics, bestows the boon of immortality upon those writers only who told the truth about life, who held no distorted mirror up to nature. The great literature of all ages is strong meat and manifestly should not be given to babes; but — and here is a fact too many of our teachers are reluctant to face — the students in our colleges, and even in our high schools, especially in our American high schools, are not babes; most of them are, as the saying has it, “old for their age,” and in some instances know more about certain aspects of life than do the pious teachers who seek to keep the knowledge from them.

But, granting for the sake of argument that we should teach naught but distinctively Catholic English classics in our schools, where are we to get sufficient

material? With a few notable exceptions, the great masterpieces of English literature were not written by Catholics; nor have all writers who happened to be Catholics written in a Catholic spirit. Thus, Alexander Pope was a Catholic, but could any reader surmise it from a perusal of "The Rape of the Lock?" How unpalatable soever we may find the fact, the great works of modern English literature are thoroughly impregnated with what Newman called the Protestant Tradition; and if we are going to teach English literature at all we must perforce take it as it stands. If we are to teach none but Catholic authors, where, I should like to know, are we to find substitutes for Shakespeare, Bacon, Spenser, Milton, Burns, Scott, Dickens, Hazlitt, Ruskin, Macaulay, Browning, Wordsworth and Tennyson? We should find at most half a dozen names among the poets, but not one of them — with the debatable exception of Francis Thompson — in the foremost rank; among the essayists, not one to stand beside or near the great Cardinal Newman; among the novelists not more than two who by any stretch of literary judgment could approximate to the secular masters like Thackeray and Stevenson; and among the dramatists — nobody at all!

It may be said that we have a goodly sprinkling of Catholic minor writers; to which I reply that you can't teach literature by means of minor writers. In literature as in all else our students deserve the best; and the best in English literature has not been

furnished by Catholic writers. The fact may be explained or minimized or lamented or rejoiced over; but I cannot see how it can be consistently questioned. Indeed, this discussion is in one respect a case of much ado about nothing. We simply *cannot* teach Catholic literature exclusively, for the sufficient reason that, speaking broadly, English literature is not Catholic.

What, then, are we to do? Several salutary things. We are to face facts, and if we have theories, see to it that they are workable. We are to make our courses in literature both Catholic and non-Catholic. We are to teach literature other than English literature, and so bring our pupils into contact with world masterpieces that are likewise Catholic masterpieces. We are to recognize and emphasize the manifestations of the Catholic spirit that are to be found in books written by non-Catholics. We are to acquaint ourselves as completely as possible with the origin, causes, progress, status and results of the Protestant Tradition in English literature. We are to point out to our pupils those maxims and tendencies in literature that emanate from the false philosophies of the sixteenth, the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and, like Virgil in the "Inferno," to warn them against the Gorgons that might turn them into stone. We are to bring home to our classes, by means of our teaching of literature, that life is a perpetual warfare, that they are members of the Church Militant, and that they must be soldiers well armed no less than well

disposed. We are to cultivate the appreciation of beauty — beauty of thought and beauty of expression and beauty of structure — for beauty is of God. And we are to remember, ever and always, that “to them that love the Lord *all things* work together unto good.”

CHAPTER XVI

"THE LITTLE FLOWER" AND LITERATURE

WHAT is it that makes a book literature? To answer would involve the necessity of framing a definition of literature, a task difficult always and at best meager in adequate results. Several things contribute to the making of a great book — artistry, largeness of vision, sureness of touch, the faculty of saying much in little, the Sophoclean gift of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole; but the great essential of genuine literature is that it see life or some phase of life, precisely as it is, that it probe beneath the appearances and concern itself mainly with the underlying realities, and that it interpret the truth thus clearly visioned with insight, with sympathy, with artistry.

It is not easy, as the world goes, to see the truth; and to tell the truth, to interpret the truth, is difficult in the extreme. The task is palpably difficult for the objective writer, the man who concerns himself with reading aright the lives of men and women around him. He needs sharp eyes and sympathy and fearlessness, he must dispense with colored spectacles and prepossessions and a weakness for his friends; but he can, provided he is big enough and broad enough and

keen enough, paint a portrait of life. So did Schiller in "Maria Stuart," Browning in "The Ring and the Book," Manzoni in "I Promessi Sposi."

The difficulty is at its maximum, however, when a man attempts to see the truth and interpret the truth of his own life and character. Few men—owing possibly to a merciful dispensation of Providence—are able to see themselves as they are; most of us stroll blissfully beneath the shading branches of a fool's paradise tuneful with the song birds of our reveries and golden with the mock-oranges of our own conceits, and we prostrate ourselves before a niche wherein stands a statue of the I-I-think-I-am. Once in a while we come across a saint—not always canonized—who possesses a specific and comprehensive knowledge of himself as he is.

A glance at the great books of the world will suffice to show that in all countries and at all times the great writers have been objective writers. We could not well afford to miss our lyric poets, our young men of vague emotions who look into their own hearts and write; but not one of them, solely on his merits as a subjective writer, has reached the supreme plane in letters. Nay, more; a stressing of the lyric note, an intrusion of the ego, would, we feel safe in maintaining, lessen existing reputations. Make Theocritus more subjective, and you rob him of his subtlest charm; insist that Horace sing only of Horace and not of the decay of pulchritude nor of the sweet content of the Sabine farm, and you give us an attenuated

Horace; demand that Keats, even, confine himself to a strictly lyrical theme and a rigidly subjective treatment, and you force us to share the sentiments of the rude *Blackwood's* reviewer who sent the young man back to his "plasters, pills and ointment boxes."

The reason for this is not hard to find. The subjective writer so seldom becomes a world writer, not necessarily because his vision of life is straitened, but essentially because his estimate of himself is untrue. He may not, probable does not, know himself as he is; that seems to be the difficulty with even unliterary men — Benvenuto Cellini, for instance, and Sir Hiram Maxim — when they try to tell the story of their lives: but even should he succeed in the rare achievement of knowing himself, he still faces — and ultimately falls before — the more difficult necessity of telling what he knows, of conveying his self-knowledge to an audience. Hence, we have so very few autobiographies that rank as literature, and even those, few and great, have pages that strike a false note, passages that savor of affectation, lack of proportion, pathetic insincerity. How our estimate of the "Decline and Fall" dwindles when we read Gibbon's "Autobiography"! And how the "Mémoires d'outre-tombe" discloses Chateaubriand's feet of clay!

It is, perhaps, an unlooked-for fact that one of the surpassing autobiographies of the world was written by a Carmelite nun, by the greatest woman writer the world has known, St. Teresa. And it is a delightful coincidence that the most remarkable and

most truly and deeply literary autobiography of our own day should be written by another Carmelite nun, Sister Thérèse, fondly known throughout the Catholic world as "The Little Flower of Jesus."

Quite properly, most of the absorbed and edified readers of "The Little Flower's" "*Histoire d'une Âme*" have paid no heed to its literary character at all; and quite possibly a few of them, possessed of a vague idea that literature has something to do with fustian and figures of speech, might even resent having so devotional a book discussed from the literary point of view. They are wont to see no common ground in books they label "sacred" and "profane," and writers must be either white sheep or black goats. But not even devout readers can well alter facts; and the fact here is that when little Sister Thérèse, in conformity with the will of her superiors, told the story of her life, she wrote not only a singularly winsome devotional volume but likewise made a genuine contribution to the literature of France and of the world.

The "*Histoire d'une Âme*" is set off from most other spiritual autobiographies by its refreshing absence of self-consciousness. There is in it no pose, not even the possibly pardonable pose of reluctance to talk about one's self. Little Sister Thérèse knows that she is a sinner, that she is far from corresponding with all the graces of God and responding to all the kindnesses of men; but so well does she know it that she accepts it as a matter of course and takes up very

little space to tell us about it. She is very unlike those good religious who make a sanctimonious fuss when obedience sends them to the photographer. She is told to draw her own picture, and smilingly and unresistingly she complies. She stands off from herself and marks her significant features; these she limns, simply and directly; then she looks up, for all the world like a little child at a drawing lesson, and sweetly asks: "Is that what you wanted me to draw?" Her concern was, not her own feelings and inclinations, but the will of her superiors; her aim was to abandon her own point of view and adopt the point of view of those who rightfully commanded her. This, truly, is the perfection of religious obedience; and it is likewise the perfection of literary self-analysis.

But that alone does not suffice to account for the literary value of the "Little Flower's" book. In the complete and hearty identification of her own will with that of her superior, Sister Thérèse is not alone. Many a religious has reached that degree of detachment and active zeal. But many a religious, charged with a similar task, would follow a different selective principle. Many a religious would resolutely repel the recollections of a beautiful and innocent childhood as condemnable worldly thoughts. Many a religious would crush the memories of fond relatives and familiar playmates as human attachments. Many a religious would suppress all mention of the humors of convent life, for are not humors essentially trivial

and conducive to evil? Many a religious, for reasons which need not here be discussed, has formed an erroneous conception of the cloistral environment.

To that class — unfortunately all too large — little Sister Thérèse did not belong. The advent of divine love did not drive human love from her heart. And so it is that she never tires of telling us of her dear mother and of her wise and saintly father — truly one of the noblest portraits ever painted. And so it is that she recounts with obvious relish numerous seemingly trivial incidents in her family life and in her school career. And how she revels, as girllike she should, in that pilgrimage to Rome! Nor does she omit to mention that, when seeking the bishop's permission to enter Carmel, she put up her hair for the first time in her life in order to impress his lordship with a sense of her maturity; truly, this, in many ways unusual — a nun recognizing the fact of hair at all! Not even does she overlook the narration — which surely must have scandalized some members of her community — of her trials with the cranky old nun who couldn't do anything without assistance and who never failed to complain of the assistance rendered.

Such things indicate that "The Little Flower" possessed the rare literary gift of recognizing the drama — now comedy, now tragedy, now even boisterous farce — that is forever being played on the stage of life. A primrose by the river's brim was more than a simple primrose to her; it was, as in truth it is, a microcosm. She was able to recognize the deep

significance of even the seemingly inconsequential events of workaday life, and she was able, in spite of — or because of — her childlike simplicity, to estimate them at their true value. Progress in spirituality did not dull her perception of the incongruities of men and things; rather it seemed to broaden her horizon and sharpen her vision.

Her brief narrations, her passing comments, her vivid and pointed descriptions, serve to give to her autobiography, considered from the literary point of view, the valuable qualities of symmetry and proportion. She looks upon what life she sees with eyes unprejudiced and unafraid. She has no special pleading to indulge in, she has no foul and barren spots to hide. Her little book gives the reader an impression of completeness; and the aesthetic not less than the spiritual effect is satisfying. Because she was so delightfully free from self-consciousness, "The Little Flower" succeeded in writing an autobiography at once true, candid and technically complete.

The "Histoire d'une Âme" has a wide and ever increasing circle of readers. Why? We should, naturally enough, expect the followers of a devout life to take to the volume for the all-sufficient reason that it is the life story of a servant of God. The devout, in many cases at least, are not wont to worry themselves over anything in a book except its spiritual pabulum and its incentives to edification; a book may be very bad indeed from an aesthetic viewpoint and yet be a truly good book to them; and even those who

possess some degree of literary appreciation have schooled themselves by long practice — may I venture to say also, through dire necessity? — to follow the advice of Thomas a' Kempis and regard not so much the manner as the matter of what they read. Since, even did "The Little Flower's" autobiography possess but negligible literary merit, devout readers would give it their attention, it is certainly not surprising that they should turn to it as it stands. Artistry, save when it grows obtrusive, most of them simply ignore; the number of devout readers who consider literary merit in a spiritual book as a scandal, a distraction, an affectation or a crime is happily small.

But devout readers are not the only readers of the "*Histoire d'une Âme*." Men and women who sweepingly and illogically condemn the lives of the saints as dry, dismal, brain-fagging stuff, have confessed themselves enchanted with the beautiful soul revelations of little Sister Thérèse. There is no need to dwell on the fact; but there is need to explain it. What is in this book to attract readers whom its purely devotional flavor would fail to attract?

Plainly, I think, the human personality that stands out so gloriously in its pages. Sister Thérèse is a consecrated spirit, a saintly Carmelite nun; but she is also a conceivable, an actual human being. Her holiness, as we see it in her story, has not the unconvincing proportions of a stain-glass saint. We recognize her as sweetly and winsomely human — more than human, if you will; yet with human nature not

barbarously crushed and strangled, but, in the light of God's all-pervading, gracious influence, sweetly elevated, purified, ennobled.

Now that human touch, which makes the whole world kin, which makes for sympathy and unselfishness and even sacrifice, is invariably found in literature. It is, indeed, an essential — should we not say *the* essential? — of every book truly great. It is the soul of art. And this it is which comes to us with little Sister Thérèse's story of her life, making her spiritual message all the clearer and her shining example all the more persuasive.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW DRYDEN BECAME A CATHOLIC

IN the year 1686, John Dryden, then fifty-five years of age, withdrew from the Church of England and entered the Roman Catholic communion. In his young manhood he had been sufficiently attached to the Puritan position to write a poem on the death of Oliver Cromwell; and subsequently he was attracted to the fashionable scepticism of the Restoration period. After middle age, however, Dryden turned seriously to religion, as we see from his "*Religio Laici*," which is a layman's defence of the Church of England, and from his metrical fable of "*The Hind and the Panther*," which, written after his conversion to Catholicism, is a tribute to the excellence of his new found faith. He lived a Catholic during the troublous days of the Catholic King James II as well as during the reign of the Protestant monarchs, William and Mary; and a Catholic he died in the last year of the seventeenth century.

Such, in brief, are the essential facts concerning the religious history of John Dryden. He was not the only Englishman of his day who, brought up a Protestant, became a Catholic; but Dryden, partly by reason of his prominence as a man of letters

and partly because of the enthusiasm with which he rushed to the defence of the Church of St. Peter, has been singled out for harsh and ill-tempered criticism. Writers ranging in scholarship, scope and viewpoint from Macaulay to Professor Christie have represented him as insincere and worldly-wise, as a time server and an opportunist; and Dr. Johnson and Sir Walter Scott have come but reluctantly and half-heartedly to his defence. Professor Saintsbury, after a careful and judicious investigation of the facts in the case, declares Dryden's conversion to Catholicism to have been "thoroughly sincere as far as conscious sincerity went"; but, he hastens to add, "of a certain amount of unconscious insincerity I am by no means disposed to acquit him."¹ The upshot of it all is that Dryden was a good Puritan when the Cromwells were dominant, that Dryden was a loyal Episcopalian under Charles II and that Dryden became an ardent Catholic when the Catholic Duke of York ascended the throne. An overwhelming majority of the writers on English history and literature would have us believe that, in no very complimentary sense, John Dryden was all things to all kings.

Is there justification for such an estimate of his character and motives? Are not practically all his critics, inheritors by blood and breeding of the "anti-Popish" tradition, victims of the "unconscious insincerity" with which Dryden has been charged? Has not the violent and ingrained hostility to the Catholic

¹ Dryden: English Men of Letters.

Church which brought about such splenetic national epidemics as the Gordon Riots been a sub-conscious factor in their decision that Dryden acted dishonestly in adopting what Scott calls "the more corrupted form of our religion"? An investigation of Dryden's religious mutations will show that the poet laureate's conversion to Catholicism was not only sincere and consistent, but, when his type of mind is taken into account, almost inevitable; and that the steps which led him from Puritanism to Catholicism constitute an interesting contribution to the psychology of religious belief.

I

Dryden's youthful adherence to the more extreme or austere form of Protestantism known as Puritanism was the most natural thing in the world. The Pickering's, his mother's family, were Puritans; and his uncle, Sir John Dryden, was among the most enthusiastic supporters of Cromwell. The poet's grandfather, Sir Erasmus Dryden, was regarded as a martyr to the Puritan cause, having been sent to prison a few years before his death in 1632 for refusing to pay loan money to King Charles I. The poet's family traditions were Puritan traditions, and his early environment was a Puritan environment.

The Puritan influence on Dryden was doubtless considerably modified during his schooldays at Westminster under that staunch royalist, Dr. Richard Busby, whom the poet held in lifelong regard; and

when he matriculated at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1650, the Puritan atmosphere there, as we learn from Pepys, had appreciably thinned. But as a political party, Puritanism was still dominant, so it is not surprising that, when Cromwell died in 1658, Dryden, then in his later twenties, should write his heroic stanzas in commemoration of the Lord Protector.

Dryden's temperament and cast of mind had anything but a natural slant in the direction of Puritan ideals; but even had we no evidence but the poem itself we should be justified in concluding that, despite his family heritage and his early environment, Dryden did not share the fervid devotion to Puritanism possessed by his uncle and his grandfather. The heroic stanzas are emphatically pedestrian stanzas, and they lack the vigor and the bounding enthusiasm which distinguish most of Dryden's poetry. This may be accounted for in part on the hypothesis that the poet had not as yet mastered the art of writing; but in matter no less than in mood the poem is conventional, perfunctory. It is a tribute to Cromwell; but by no stretch of appreciation can it be characterized as a glowing tribute.

Dryden, in short, was a Puritan by virtue of family and training, but not through character and conviction. Puritanism was the garment in which his infant body had been swathed, but it failed signally to grow with its wearer. As a form of religion it never appealed to him. As a political faction it was in the ascendancy during his young manhood, its leading figure had as-

sumed the proportions of a national hero, so expediency, if nothing else, would lead Dryden to respect the power of Puritanism and to entertain a dutiful regard toward the Lord Protector. If the heroic stanzas demonstrate one thing more than another it is that Dryden's veneration of Cromwell was elicited by the politician rather than by the religionist.

At the time the poem was written and for some years afterward, Dryden had no definite religious views at all. He was a man who developed slowly. While many of his contemporaries were out of college before they were out of their teens, Dryden was twenty-three before he received his bachelor's degree. He achieved prominence as a man of letters when in the thirties, and his best work was not done until two decades later. He required nearly a lifetime to formulate his theory of literature, the development of which may be traced in his essays dating from 1668 to 1699. And so he took a correspondingly long time to orientate himself in religious matters, especially as with him religion was a thing more of the head than of the heart.

II

"My thoughtless youth was winged with vain desires;
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
Followed false lights; and when their glimpse was gone
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own."

In these lines from "The Hind and the Panther" Dryden summarizes the history of his religious ex-

perience from his youth to the time when, seeing the necessity of a visible church and a body of definite dogma, he wrote a defence of the established form of religion in his "Religio Laici." During his long London career as a dramatist and a writer of political satires, extending roughly from 1662 to 1682, Dryden was an exceedingly busy man; and the busy man has proverbially neither time nor inclination to puzzle himself over religious problems. But Dryden was no recluse poet living in an attic, and his interest in the theater, his attendance at those interminable discussions at the coffee houses and his connection with the court of Charles II where from 1670 he occupied the posts of poet laureate and royal historiographer, kept him thoroughly in touch with current thought. Now the Restoration drama — including Dryden's own contributions to it — was the most frankly immoral period of the English stage; the habitués of the coffee houses were chiefly literary workers of the perennial Bohemian stripe and wits who made great parade of their fashionable scepticism; and the king, whose shameless profligacy was equalled only by his lack of religious convictions, set an example to the court. It is not surprising that Dryden "followed false lights."

The thinkers of the day — and Dryden was nothing if not a thinker — burnt their incense before the shrine of John Hobbes. Hobbes's vogue was greatest during the decade preceding his death in 1679. His theory of the absolute nature of state rights, his doc-

trines of extreme materialism, his adaptation of many of the principles laid down by Descartes, his embodiment of that downright if shortsighted quality of common sense always so dear to the English mind, his eminently quotable epigrams and his not less eminently convenient looseness of terminology all tended to insure his popularity. He had his disciples, his imitators and his middlemen — “wandering fires” that left their charred and blackened spots on subsequent English philosophic thought.

It was inevitable that Dryden, who was not only in his age but of it, should fall under the influence of Hobbes; that he had read the English philosopher we know from a passage in his essay, “On Translating the Poets.” And it was furthermore inevitable, owing to the peculiar bent of his mind, that, having absorbed the current principles of polite scepticism, he should formulate some theories on his own account. That this is precisely what happened we have his own assurance:

“ . . . and when their glimpse was gone
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.”

Should we desire more evidence that such was Dryden’s normal mental process, we have it in the manner in which he developed his theory of poetry and the drama. His earlier essays concern themselves with a re-statement and comparison of the theories underlying representative writers, ancient and modern; his later essays, based upon his own work as poet and

dramatist, are the embodiment of the theories of his art wrought out of its practice during many years. The famous essay, "Of Dramatic Poesy," is a presentation of divergent views concerning the use of rime and allied topics; and though the author is one of the four participants in the discussion, he does not commit himself with any degree of definiteness. He is here what Hamalius styles him, the great compromiser. But he does not rest here. When we turn to the preface to his translation of Virgil or to his essay, "On Translating the Poets," we see that after some twenty-five years he has secured a large measure of critical independence and sureness of touch and has made a distinct selection from the store of poetical theory bequeathed him from the past. Here, like the prudent householder in the Gospel, he draws from his treasure both new things and old.

For another reason it is well that we should not forget Dryden's development as a critic of poetry and drama, for that development had an indisputable effect on his religious status. His years of experimentation with literary forms taught him what in the last century years of literary analysis taught Paul Bourget — the necessity of authority. A powerful motive in bringing the French novelist to his knees was his recognition of the fact that mere impressionism, either in art or in morals, makes for ultimate chaos. It was a somewhat similar chain of reasoning that led Brunetière to exclaim: "If you wish to know what I believe, go to Rome and find out! "

John Dryden had at least one thing in common with Ferdinand Brunetière. That is what Professor Saintsbury calls "a considerable touch of the scholastic." And Scott expresses the same thought in a slightly different form: "The distinguishing characteristic of Dryden's genius seems to have been the power of reasoning, and of expressing the result in appropriate language." Now when a man reasons concerning literary matters—and it is a process that not all who call themselves critics deign to employ—he is not long in reaching a point where he perceives the need of standards; and the existence of standards implies the necessity of authority. And such a man—if he meddle with religious matters at all—must be led, by even more cogent reasons, to recognize there, too, the necessity of dogmatic teaching.

That such, at all events, was the case with Dryden we have more than mere conjecture. His poem, "Religio Laici," is his profession of belief in the existence of the spiritual sense in man and of his recognition of a teaching church which is the custodian of Divine revelation. In the preface—an invaluable document to one who would trace the evolution of the author's religious belief—while maintaining that he is "naturally inclined to scepticism in philosophy," he insists that religion is something infinitely above philosophy and "that we have not lifted up ourselves to God by the weak pinions of our reason, but he has been pleased to descend to us."

Despite the fact that in the body of the poem as

in the preface he misreads the bearing of the Athanasian Creed, scoffs — as only Dryden can scoff — at the claims of the Roman communion, expresses his fear of that eternal bugaboo, the Jesuit, and in other ways shows himself loyal to the tradition of English Protestantism, he nevertheless makes a powerful, if unwitting, argument in favor of the Catholic Church. He answers objections against the fact of a revealed religion; he insists upon the inspiration of Scripture; he emphasizes the authenticity of at least a portion of tradition, though he is not certain as to what principle should guide in discriminating between the true and the spurious; he is obviously impressed with the advantage of the doctrine of papal infallibility though he endeavors to disprove its possession by the Church of Rome.

Every open-minded reader of “*Religio Laici*” must agree, in essentials, with the following estimate of it by Scott:

“In considering Dryden’s creed thus analysed, I think it will appear that the author, though still holding the doctrines of the Church of England, had been biassed, in the course of his inquiry, by those of Rome. His wish for the possibility of an infallible guide, expressed with almost indecent ardour, the difficulty, nay, it would seem, in his estimation, almost the impossibility, of discriminating between corrupted and authentic traditions, while the necessity of the latter to the interpretation of Scripture is plainly admitted, appear, upon the whole, to have left the poet’s mind

in an unpleasing state of doubt, from which he rather escapes than is relieved. He who only acquiesces to the doctrines of his Church, because the exercise of his private judgment may disturb the tranquillity of the State, can hardly be said to be in a state to give a reason for the faith that is in him."¹

III

In 1686, four years after the appearance of his "Religio Laici," Dryden was received into the Catholic Church. That the Catholic sovereign, James II, had ascended the throne of England early in the preceding year is often emphasized as a significant fact relative to the poet laureate's change of faith; but the truth appears to be that the accession of the former monarch's brother was not even a minor motive of Dryden's renunciation of Protestantism. Dryden needed no such play for favor to stand in the good graces of the new regime. He had really nothing to gain. Already, and prior to his conversion, he had been continued by James in his offices of poet laureate and royal historiographer. Long before he had given any manifestation of a leaning toward the Catholic faith he had indirectly lent his influence to the succession of the Duke of York by his "Absalom and Achitophel," a bitter satire on the attempts of Shaftesbury to insure the crown to Charles's illegiti-

¹ The Life of John Dryden, in Scott's edition of Dryden's works.

mate son, the Duke of Monmouth. That performance had doubtless been prompted less by devotion to James Stuart than by opposition to certain prominent members of the Monmouth faction; but nevertheless when James came to the throne Dryden could say with Othello, "I have done the state some service, and they know it."

He had nothing to gain; and he had much to lose. Whatever else may be thought of Dryden, it can at least be confidently stated that he was no fool; and he was sufficiently conversant with both the character of James and the temperament of the English people to foresee the conflict that in a few short months was to become so sad a reality. That he did foresee the eventual discomfiture of the Catholics is sufficiently indicated in the episode of the swallows in the third part of "The Hind and the Panther." Had he not lived in London in the days of Titus Oates and the frenzy of the alleged Popish Plot? In order to insure the continued enjoyment of his cakes and ale it was neither necessary nor desirable that he should adopt the religion of the man who had taken a palpably precarious seat on the throne of England. As a matter of fact — Macaulay to the contrary notwithstanding — his conversion brought him no advantage that he did not already possess. From the point of view of worldly wisdom his safest course would have been to sit tight and keep still and watch the way the winds blew.

In becoming a Catholic, even were he assured that

the new king would be safe from deposition, Dryden exposed himself to serious inconveniences. He was a prominent man, and he had a sufficiency of personal and professional enemies who, he must have foreseen, would be ready enough to doubt the sincerity of his conversion. Dryden was no saint; but he had one thing in common with the most notable ornaments of sainthood — he suffered on account of his faith. The announcement of his conversion was the signal for a broadside of abuse and ridicule from the riff-raff of the riming tribe which continued not only to the time of his death but even broke out with indecent violence on the occasion of his public funeral. And its spirit survives to this day in the treatment accorded Dryden by writers whom we might reasonably expect to exercise more critical discernment and scholarly restraint. Nowadays we hold, at least in theory, that a man's change of mind concerning the religious faith he professes is that man's own business. A vastly different opinion prevailed in seventeenth century England, and this applied with especial force to the man who might announce his conversion to the Catholic faith. So Dryden's conversion to Catholicism necessitated a re-adjustment of his whole life, a process which comes none too easily to a man well on in his fifties. Dryden reckoned with all these things, which he certainly would not have done were his conversion a mere change of face to suit the new and uncertain complexion of the royal court.

An excellent specimen of the attitude of the present

day critic toward this important event in Dryden's career is afforded in the following words from Professor Christie:

"It would be difficult in any case to give Dryden credit for perfect sincerity and disinterestedness in his adoption of the Roman Catholic religion, after James the Second became king; but his antecedents and general character make this altogether impossible. Dryden's temperament was by no means of that sort which engenders sudden conversions. He was not impulsive, and he had no enthusiasm. His clear, sharp intellect, and his strong critical faculty, made it easy for him to see faults and flaws, and protected him against all fanaticism. His 'Religio Laici' is the mature expression of a faith which is more of the head than of the heart: it is the religion of a calm and clear-sighted man, who has reasoned himself into accepting a quantum of theology, and desires as little dogma as possible."¹

It would be difficult to find a more complete misreading of the facts. We have seen that Dryden's "antecedents and general character" constitute a gradual and increasingly forceful development in the direction of Catholicism, and that his conversion was very far from being in any sense a sudden conversion. The "Religio Laici" is written from the viewpoint of a man who has indeed "reasoned himself into accepting a quantum of theology, and desires as little dogma as possible," but it is so written simply because a clear

¹ Introduction to Selected Poems by Dryden: Oxford, 1893.

and consistent thinker with a scholastic trend of mind could find in the Established Church but a modicum of theology and dogma to accept. It is easy to see that at the back of Professor Christie's mind lies entrenched that stubborn Protestant Tradition which identifies the Catholic faith with fanaticism and regards conversion to that faith as a step backward out of light into darkness. It is the Protestant Tradition fostered by the annual observance of Guy Fawkes Day, the tradition that expressed itself in such diverting manifestations as the Popish Plot agitation and the Gordon Riots and which to this day leads some of the otherwise clearest heads in England to look upon such men as Cardinal Newman as unfortunate reactionaries.

Dryden gave, in his own way, a reason for the faith that was in him by publishing, in April, 1687, his second religious poem, "The Hind and the Panther." That he already felt and rightly appreciated the personal hostility which his conversion to Catholicism brought about is indicated in the opening paragraph of his preface. "All men," he tells us, "are engaged either on this side or that; and though conscience is the common word which is given by both, yet if a writer fall among enemies and cannot give the marks of *their* conscience, he is knocked down before the reasons for his own are heard."

In the poem itself he provides a reliable key to his conversion in his insistence on the necessity of an infallible church:

"What weight of ancient witness can prevail
If private reason hold the public scale?
But, gracious God, how well dost thou provide
For erring judgments an unerring guide!
Thy throne is darkness in the abyss of light,
A blaze of glory that forbids the sight.
O teach me to believe thee thus concealed,
And search no farther than thyself revealed;
But her alone for my director take,
Whom thou hast promised never to forsake!

Why choose we then like bilanders to creep
Along the coast and land in view to keep,
When safely we may launch into the deep?
In the same vessel which our Saviour bore,
Himself the pilot, let us leave the shore,
And with a better guide a better world explore."

And so, in the course of his extended fable, wherein the Catholic Church is the "milk-white Hind" and the Established Church the "spotted Panther," Dryden reviews the religious situation in England in the days of James II and sets forth for all who care to read with unprejudiced eyes the motives that led him to Rome. If any further proof of the sincerity of his conversion were needed, we have it in his attitude of kindly consideration toward those whom until recently he had called his brethren in the faith. He is harsh enough toward the "buffoon Ape," the Free-thinker; the "bristled baptist Boar," the Anabaptist; the "insatiate Wolf," the Presbyterian; but the "Panther" is

" . . . sure the noblest next the Hind,
And fairest creature of the spotted kind."

In this Dryden recalls St. Augustine who, after his conversion to orthodox Christianity, was always more kindly disposed toward his former co-religionists, the Manicheans, than toward the Donatists and other heretics. We entertain a not entirely groundless suspicion of the neophyte who with indecent haste proceeds to throw stones at his erstwhile brethren.

But the ultimate and unanswerable proof of Dryden's good faith is his perseverance in Catholicism. Shortly after the accession of William and Mary, he lost his yearly pension of one hundred pounds, his place in the customs, his post as royal historiographer and his office of poet laureate; and, to make the cup the more bitter, he saw his old enemy Shadwell, whom he had excoriated in "MacFlecknoe," garlanded with the laureateship. Thus Dryden, because he was guilty of the unpardonable crime of being a Catholic, was left destitute when almost sixty years of age. Why, if he had been a time-server and opportunist all his life, did he not renounce his new found faith and curry favor with William of Orange? The thing has been done many a time by men whose interest has centered largely in the location of the flesh pots. But instead Dryden resumed his pen and eked out what existence he could by writing more plays and engaging in translations. When he died, a Catholic, in 1700, he left no will; there was practically nothing to leave.

We have seen that Dryden's conversion to Catholicism was the final link in a chain of religious experience which in its essentials is representative of the de-

vious ways along which a large number of men have come into the Catholic Church. The Puritanism in which he had been brought up never profoundly affected him and he sloughed it in his young manhood. Next he adopted the fashionable scepticism of the times; but his cast of mind was such that he could not permanently content himself with a negative attitude toward religion, and the outcome was his mature adhesion to the Episcopal form of belief. This, with his earnestness and thoroughgoing powers of analysis, he sifted and weighed; and, finding it wanting in certain of the marks of the Church of Christ, he proceeded, as a last resort, to examine the claims of the Catholic Church with the result that he could consistently exclaim:

“ Good life be now my task; my doubts are done! ”

It may be urged that in that very line Dryden stands self-condemned; that neither before nor after his conversion to Catholicism was he conspicuous for sanctity. Certainly, not even his most sanguine admirers would have the hardihood to seek his canonization; but on the other hand we have no reason for supposing that his profession of aiming at a good life was a mere rhetorical effusion. The plays that he wrote in his first dramatic period are undeniably foul, and the fact that they are not more so than most contemporary dramas — dramas that have today fallen into an eminently deserved neglect — does not excuse them. It is true likewise that much that he wrote

subsequent to his conversion is decidedly strong meat for babes; but Dryden was a man of his times and he wrote for his times, and though his public acknowledgment of his breaches of good taste and decency does not condone his offences, it at least serves to remind us that he regretted his professional shortcomings. As to his private life, his enemies have gone through his career most thoroughly in their search for moral lapses, and the most they have been able to unearth is that he was once beaten by hired ruffians, that he generally knew a good thing when he wrote it, that he was not happily married and that, in the days of his youth, he was once discovered in the heinous act of discussing a tart with an actress, properly chaperoned. Verily, from such sins may we all be delivered!

The obverse of his character is given by his contemporary, the dramatist Congreve:

"He was of a nature exceedingly humane and compassionate; easily forgiving injuries, and capable of a prompt and sincere reconciliation with them who had offended him. . . . His friendship, where he professed it, went much beyond his professions, and I have been told of strong and generous instances of it, by the persons themselves who received them. . . . To the best of my knowledge and observation he was of all men that ever I knew one of the most modest, and the most easily to be discountenanced in his approaches to his superiors or his equals."¹

¹ Quoted by Christie, *op. cit.*

A supernatural element inheres in all conversions; often God makes use of natural means to bring men to a realization of right and truth, but His grace is the essential and ever present moving power. It stands to the eternal credit of John Dryden, poet, dramatist, satirist and critic, that he did not turn aside when the Divine Hand stretched out to him and led him on.

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